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# Journey

September 2016



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# Editor's note

At a recent seminar exploring moral disagreement in the media age, ABC commentator Scott Stephens noted, "Opinion isn't something you fasten onto, or you express in a kneejerk, instead opinion is something that is incubated within the soul, with intelligence, with moral conviction, hopefully with a great deal of reading, hopefully with a great deal of chastening from others."

Everyone has an opinion on a wide range of issues—including, most likely, those covered within this edition—but have they been formed by a great deal of reading, intelligence and moral conviction?

The complexities and nuances of today's global conflicts and challenges demand a much more rigorous interrogation of ideas than simply getting swept up in identity politics or deferring to a television personality, and then blasting out an opinion on social media or at a get-together with friends or family.

You may have an opinion on this nation's Indigenous incarceration epidemic, but it is clear there are no easy fixes to the problem and the seemingly annual release of well-intentioned words and official inquiries is not leading to a sustainable solution. We hope our feature on First Peoples prison chaplains (page 6) gets you thinking about the issue and contributes to a wider discussion on what could be a circuit breaker to the cycle of harm and hopelessness. I look forward to your letters on this.

Elsewhere, Dianne Jensen's feature on church newcomers (page 8) is a terrific look at welcoming strategies to embrace that stranger who walks through church doors in search of God and community. Does your church make newcomers feel at home or is it simply more concerned with maintaining the status-quo? Again, I eagerly await your letters on how you make strangers welcome in your church; I'm sure other readers would also appreciate innovative ideas from others.

Ashley Thompson talks with Brisbane musician Tony Doevendans (page 16) about faith, music and disability inclusiveness. It's a great read, and draws attention to how seemingly harmless statements or questions can have a deeper emotional impact on those with a disability. If you'd like to know more about disability inclusiveness and spirituality, please stay tuned as we are busy planning a feature article for a forthcoming edition.

**Ben Rogers**  
Cross-platform editor

# Contents



6 Prison break  
Indigenous incarceration



8 Stranger danger



16 Profile: Tony Dee

4 Moderator's message

5 Trinity sharpens  
future focus

10 2015/16 Synod  
office annual report

15 Small is beautiful:  
Magnetic Island

18 Mission-Ready  
(or not)

19 5 faith-themed  
classic books

20 Review:  
*The Mask You Live In*

21 Fast news

22 *The Scoop*  
Letters to the editor

# Journey



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Closing date for editorial and advertising for October *Journey* is Monday 12 September. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 2 October.



# Facing the fundamentals of fatherhood

## Monday Midday Prayer

*Loving God,*

*Thank you for the changes of the seasons, reminding us of the order of creation, and our place in it.*

*Amen*

**Generally, in Australia anyhow, Father's Day seems more important to automotive goods stores and Harvey Norman than anyone else. And fathers don't seem too upset about that.**

A pat on the back, and a "Thanks, Dad" is enough for most; we're mainly low-key about fathers. In a lot of television sit-coms since the 1960s they've pretty much played the standard butt-of-the-joke role, and no one complained about that.

Yet, more and more, a quality father-figure is seen as critical to the development of healthy, well-adjusted people.

In a gender-charged time, which the Western world is currently experiencing, discussing a distinct role for fathers is fraught, but the West's zeitgeist shouldn't stop a people who have been called into being for 3500 years and are present across all cultures, from discussing such a fundamental role in society.

Generally, the Judeo-Christian tradition names the role of father as establishing, protecting and upholding.

So there's something there that's more structural, that defines and sustains a space, a relational space in which family and individual life can find its own particular and unique flourishing.

Maybe in that Australian low-key approach is a resonance of the biblical themes of fatherhood. This space is about providing confidence and security to grow, to discover.

But if fatherhood is about establishing, protecting and upholding, it's not necessarily distant, secondary or hidden; it can also be, and should be, close and personal.

The experience of living under fatherhood should be about knowing we are known, more than we know ourselves, and in that knowledge, knowing we are loved, we are secure.

That was my experience, and it didn't just come from my father, it also came from my church. My church told me that fatherhood was one way I could understand God's relationship to me; my church told me it was a way I can understand who God is.

In the life of God which the church has encountered, we named our experience in terms of God who creates and sustains life; who is present to creation and yet distinct from it; we also named God as present in Jesus, who stands irrevocably in solidarity with us; we named God as present through the Spirit, who brings us out of ourselves, who calls us into community.

So fatherhood occupies a particular role for our health and wellbeing; however you experience it, may it call you into life, and life in all its fullness.

**Rev David Baker**  
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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# Trinity sharpens future focus

Trinity College Queensland's new strategic model reflects a fresh direction in leadership training in the Queensland Synod. *Journey* reports.

**Against the backdrop of a constantly evolving, competitive tertiary education sector, Trinity College Queensland has unveiled its Future Ministry Model for providing lay education and chaplaincy training.**

The initiative has been approved by the Board for Christian Formation (BCF) and endorsed by the Synod Standing Committee.

Dr Leigh Trevaskis, Trinity's recently appointed director of Education for Ministry, says that at its core the Future Ministry Model "looks to produce mission-ready graduates from our accredited and non-accredited pathways into ministry".

"We're appointing faculty that contribute at all levels of theological education and in 2017 we'll launch a new program for lay people. A heavy emphasis on preaching and the application of the Bible and Christian theology will characterise Trinity, delivered in flexible modes to meet the challenges of a modern lifestyle."

The changes—which include appointing a new dean of Formation and Dispersed Learning and a lecturer in Church History and Society—will entail a major shakeup of the present faculty structure, but those due to leave the college have been provided with appropriate notice periods and support services.

Rev David Baker, chair of the Synod Standing Committee notes, "Aspects of the new direction meant that staff changes had to occur. The staff who are not a part of the future of Trinity are quality people, who have gifts to help the church fulfil its mission. They are being supported through this transition."

Rev Peter Lockhart, chairperson of the BCF adds, "Whilst the BCF laments the loss of staff and recognises this involved changing its own mind on some decisions through the process, the BCF came to the conclusion that the model being proposed and the new team would provide greater efficiencies and opportunity for the Synod moving into the future."

Peter stresses that the Future Ministry Model "invites people from beyond the bounds of this Synod and the Uniting Church to get involved".

"Some of this certainly builds on what has been developing at Trinity and I give thanks for the staff who developed the college to this point. For me one of the keys to this model is that there is a vision that says we are here to offer quality theological education, formation, and spiritual development to everyone across the Synod at whatever level they wish to study, unaccredited seminar through to a doctorate."

"As the Chair of the BCF I encourage your prayers for, and then also your participation in, the life of Trinity."

*For more information on the Future Ministry Model visit [trinity.qld.edu.au](http://trinity.qld.edu.au)*

“

There is a vision that says we are here to offer quality theological education, formation, and spiritual development to everyone across the Synod at whatever level they wish to study, unaccredited seminar through to a doctorate.

**Rev Peter Lockhart**



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# Prison break

## Unlocking hope amidst Indigenous incarceration

The alarming incarceration rate of First Peoples highlights the long and painful path towards reconciliation and justice for many Australians. *Journey* explores the issue and speaks to the prison chaplains on the frontline.

“  
People matter  
to God,  
prisoners  
included and  
so they matter  
to me. We are  
servants of  
Christ, seeing  
Christ in the  
other  
Lynette Hastie

**Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull may have recently declared the incarceration rates of young Indigenous people a “top priority” in light of alarming revelations of prisoner abuse in the Northern Territory, but little about this story will surprise those working in and living through the grim reality of life behind bars. The issue has long been a shameful reminder that our “lucky country” isn’t so lucky for First Peoples, regardless of age.**

The statistics are bleak. Despite First Peoples only making up three per cent of the nation’s overall population, they make up 27 per cent of the national prison population according to 2015 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data.

These numbers could be even worse given the way prison data is collected and analysed, according to Thalia Anthony in *The Conversation*. She notes that the data does not “represent the through-flow of prisoners across a year” and that official prison measurements are just a “point-in-time, they reflect the number of prisoners on a certain day (generally 30 June) in any given year”.

While the graphic images of youth in detention (regardless of ethnicity) have brought this issue into the spotlight, Indigenous advocates including the Uniting Church and its agencies have led a sustained campaign to highlight the systemic and entrenched injustice of Indigenous incarceration.

In April this year, Senator Patrick Dodson, former chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, delivered a blunt reality check to the National Press Club: “The current incarceration of Indigenous people is a complete and utter disgrace. Accepting that permits the criminal justice system to continue to suck us up like a vacuum cleaner and deposit us like waste in custodian institutions.”

He noted that the number of Indigenous people in jail has doubled since the release of the findings of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody 25 years ago.

### Dealing with the data

While all Australians would agree there are criminal acts that warrant an appropriate custodial sentence regardless of ethnicity, a broad range of legal, social and political factors unfairly tilt the justice system against First Peoples and contribute to the grossly disproportionate incarceration rate.

Dr Troy Allard, writing for the Australian Institute of Criminology’s *Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse*, explains, “The high rate of over-representation for public order offences suggests that changes to legislation, police and court practices may be necessary to avoid a disproportionate impact on Indigenous people.”

“Policing public order offences is highly discretionary, influenced by the history of antipathy between police and some Indigenous communities as well as poor police practices such as over-policing.”

Beyond the manner in which policing is applied, the legal process presents further challenges for Indigenous Australians: poor legal representation and basic language comprehension problems during the legal process can hinder a defendant’s prospects in court. Additionally, a punitive political climate drenched in “tough on crime” rhetoric only heightens the chances of courts applying custodial sentences and longer periods on remand.

For young people, the lack of appropriate home supervision during remand often means that they spend long periods in detention even before facing court.

ABS statistics also reveal that the most common offence or charge for Indigenous prisoners is acts intended to cause injury, highlighting entrenched social dysfunction and disadvantage that cannot be ameliorated by quick-fixes or simply tweaking the system.



(L-R) Louise Thomas, Lynette Hastie and Rev Dennis Corowa.  
Photos: Supplied

### The Bible behind bars

Into this heartbreaking and seemingly intractable situation, First Peoples chaplains deliver the gospel of hope and redemption. A reminder that, in the words of the late American gospel and jazz singer Ethel Waters, “I know I’m somebody because God don’t make no junk”.

First Peoples Chaplains (FPC) is a service provider to Queensland Correctional Services under the auspices of UnitingCare Queensland. UnitingCare Community Prison Ministry administers the ecumenical, volunteer-driven service.

Rev Gerda Olafsen, Prison Ministry senior chaplain/state coordinator (interim) says that the Indigenous chaplains provide important ministry in challenging circumstances, including the ongoing distress of witnessing the sheer numbers of their people behind bars.

“First People chaplains are strongly connected to their families and communities which can mean that they are called upon to support and help and then work very hard. A number of chaplains are also pastors in their congregations. They are dedicated and committed people,” she says.

Vincent Matheson, First Peoples chaplain to Lotus Glen Correctional Centre in North Queensland, was drawn to the ministry by the sadness he felt in seeing his people incarcerated.

“We go there for their well-being, to provide support and encourage inmates to better themselves,” he says. “Indigenous chaplains relate to and understand Indigenous inmates. We share a cultural connection.”

Fellow chaplain Zane Saunders sees the role as putting his faith into action, moving from theory to practice and learning more about himself along the way.

“FPC chaplains seek to be inclusive and accountable. The Christian message needs to be contextualised into the culture of the inmate,” he says.

Townsville Correctional Centre chaplain Louise Thomas points to the importance of accepting the journey of inmates and identifying with their stories. She adds:

“[We are to be] obedient to the will of God who has written his laws on our hearts, minds and spirits.”

Her colleague Dale says, “Our people need better outcomes and a change of life style. We need to share the Gospel message in a way that promotes and encourages change.”

### Heritage of faith

Rev Dennis Corowa, national chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and a former Queensland prison chaplain, points out that prison ministry has been central to Congress for many decades.

“When we have church services in those prisons on Sundays, the biggest population of prisoners from inside the correctional centres are Aboriginal men,” says Dennis.

“It’s a fair indication of the strength of respect they have for their heritage of the Christian faith that our people have adopted through difficult times, over long periods of family groups and through the mission areas ... I think God’s done a great job through the missionaries because what you see there is the faith in God that our people have.”

In spite of the bleak statistics, Dennis believes that it is never too late for those who have been incarcerated to start again with a helping hand and good support.

“There was a young fella—Robert—he’d done life in prison and he would have went in at a younger age,” says Dennis. “I met him when he was coming

to the end of his time served ... I asked him if I could get him into doing a course at our theological college in Cairns, Wontulp-Bi-Buya. I contacted the college to arrange him having some courses and [said] that I could assist him with some tutoring; it was a certificate in theology and community organising.

“The correctional services gave him permission to attend the college in Cairns with my sponsorship from our local congregation in Townsville at the time. He completed those courses and when he was released from prison he used to do work around the church, painting and all that, he had a job with one of the local community organisations, he bought himself two cars, he really went on. But he passed away, he ended up having diabetes and we lost him some years ago: diabetes is also a major epidemic for our people.”

While Robert’s story is a poignant illustration of the multi-faceted disadvantage facing Indigenous inmates, it taught Dennis that God is not constrained by prison bars.

“Sometimes you think you’re so far away and the gap is too wide for these guys to have some of the possibilities you or I have had ... But when I took this young fella out of there—he committed this crime and did 12 years—he was able to make that change and I thought God has given me a story that when God gives the strength of determination that he gave to young Robert, changes can happen.”

Lotus Glen Correctional Centre chaplain Lynette Hastie sums up the simple truth at the core of this ministry bringing hope in the darkest of times for Indigenous Australians.

“People matter to God, prisoners included and so they matter to me. We are servants of Christ, seeing Christ in the other.”

# Stranger danger

## Creating welcoming church communities

Someone new walks into church. You're torn between maintaining a polite distance and asking them around for lunch and afternoon Bible study. **Dianne Jensen** talks to two quite different Uniting Churches about welcoming newcomers.

**Stepping through the church door can be a scary business. The jargon and rituals are unnerving—and that's before someone is invited to stand up and sing! Yet the challenge of welcoming newcomers lies at the heart of mission. It lays bare the message we preach and is a core measure of healthy church communities.**

### Who's the new guy?

We're not talking about switchers or transferees from other churches. The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) defines newcomers as either first-timers or returnees from way back.

According to director Dr Ruth Powell in her 2015 paper *Giving newcomers a voice: what newcomers reveal about their experience of joining a church*, these people are likely to seek out the church in mid-adulthood (30–49 years). For over 80 per cent, the most important factor in deciding whether to come back is the friendliness of the people and the sense of community.

Peter Kaldor in *Connections for Life: core qualities to foster in your church* (NCLS 2002) says that many factors work together to create welcome. He cites a clear vision for the future, an intentional outward focus, attenders who are keen to invite others and worship that attenders find positive and helpful as top attributes.

His research shows that cutting through the traditional packaging of Sunday worship is essential to making faith both relevant and comprehensible to newcomers.

"Our church research confirms that ... churches with contemporary styles of worship and music are more likely to be attracting and integrating higher levels of newcomers," says Peter.

### Too hard basket?

If all this sounds too hard, keep in mind that Uniting Churches of all shapes and sizes are already effectively incorporating newcomers into their communities (see our story on Magnetic Island Uniting Church on page 15). *Journey* spoke to two quite different churches to find out how they are living out their mission.

### Standing out in a crowd

Marcelle Fricker is newcomers coordinator at Newlife Uniting Church on the Gold Coast, a fast-growing church with between 300 and 400 people at each service. The Connect ministry was set up to ensure that newcomers don't get lost in the crowd.

"Number one, newcomers are looking for someone to talk to them," says Marcelle. "Some people come with specific needs; some haven't been to a church in decades, and others are coming from a different denomination—but everyone wants to know that they are not going to feel like an outsider."

The Newlife Connect volunteers wear distinctive shirts and staff the car park, church courtyard and welcome desk. During the service people are invited to fill out a contact card which can be exchanged for a coffee voucher and welcome. There is also a dedicated welcome space outside the church, hosted by the young families' pastor.

"It's the degree of welcome that makes that work or not, so we are very intentional about how we greet people," says Marcelle. "We also have section leaders in the church on the look-out for new people or people sitting alone so that no one feels unloved."

Once details are in the pastoral care system, a welcome text is automatically generated within 24 hours and Marcelle follows up with a phone call. Welcome functions are held every six weeks and new Christians or seekers are channelled into an appropriate group such as Alpha or Christianity Explained.

Small groups are key to integration, she says. "It's how we do most of our pastoral care—especially in a growing church, having quality small groups makes a big difference."

### Leap of faith

Darryl Holbrook, 50, had become a Christian about two years before a friend invited him to Newlife. Although he stayed in the back rows initially, attracted by the church's contemporary music and worship, Darryl realised that the next move was up to him.

“If you can drop the religion but keep the fundamental gospel message and talk in a relevant way—people are drawn to the church”  
**Derek Schiller**



“I said—we need to sit down the front, we are not talking to anybody and the whole idea of attending a church is to be part of that community. Well, my friend didn’t come back but I stayed and afterwards I would just go out into the courtyard and different people would come and say hello. I was going for about a month and then I got baptised—17 April last year—and about two weeks after that I joined a small group.”

Darryl understands that church jargon can be a barrier for the friends he invites to join him.

“Even when you talk about sin, non-believers don’t know what sin is so there’s no good telling them they are sinning because they are like, well what are you talking about? I just know that God did awesome things in my life. The people who have known me have watched that transformation and that’s why I get all these people talking to me about it—what’s going on, what’s happening? And I just invite them to church.”

### Country welcome

The Uniting Church in the western Queensland town of St George has a vibrant congregation committed to sharing the gospel and willing to do things differently.

Rev Derek Schiller says that delivering the message is foremost.

“Anything that is happening at St George is profoundly gospel-based. We focus on preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and we find that plain language is central to breaking down some of the barriers. That might seem strange, but if you can drop the religion but keep the fundamental gospel message and talk in a relevant way—people are drawn to the church.”

St George has a transient population and there are often new families at church including short-term workers. Derek says that the combination of an outwardly focused congregation and country hospitality means that no one is left out. There are regular after-church activities such as lunches, water-skiing or Frisbee.

“When people come to our church we feel that they are warmly welcomed. People talk to them, invite them back for lunch, and invite them to join groups that relate to them.”

The church has hired the old theatre and hosts a range of groups, sporting events and community activities including a Thursday night youth group with 40 high-schoolers and the Jesus A Friend For All primary school group with even more young people. The church’s winter day camp attracts over 150 children.

“Our view is that we have to break down the idea of church being just a Sunday morning event,” says Derek. “The church gathering is when two or three are gathered in my name, so we consider a lot of events during the week just as central to the church as Sunday morning.”

### I was a stranger

Ned Jones, 17, still remembers walking through the door to attend afternoon Bible study at Derek Schiller’s place.

“Besides the fact that you know that everyone already there is a Christian, going there just sort of feels a little intimidating. You don’t really know if you should speak up and say what you think or just keep quiet. But I went there and it was really welcoming and Derek really encouraged me to speak up,” he says.

Ned was invited to the group by a Christian mate.

“He said, ‘You don’t need to love God, but I just want you to believe that he’s real’, so I went there and listened and it was probably one of the best decisions that I’ve made ... it was amazing to be able to go to the sort of program that Derek runs—it was awesome, the stuff that he spoke about was just spot on.”

Ned feels right at home in the church community.

“Being able to go there and experience and worship the God who made us is amazing—and being able to learn how much he loves us is a ridiculous thing that I want everyone to be able to know.”

Left: Newcomers coordinator at Newlife Uniting Church Marcelle Fricker with newcomer Darryl Holbrook.  
**Photo:** Supplied

Above: Rev Derek Schiller, St George Uniting Church, with congregation member Ned Jones.  
**Photo:** Supplied

# The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland

# 2015/16 Synod office annual report



## *Examining the 'now', imagining the 'new'*

At the 32nd Synod in Session, members gathered and allowed themselves to reimagine a future for the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod. We did this in a variety of ways and gave ourselves the space and grace to get excited about possibilities and potential.

How wonderful it is that our church has the capacity to:

- examine its own existing systems and internal drivers and plan how we could improve; and also
- imagine a completely different state for the church and start to dream about how we might get there.

The Queensland Synod office seeks to provide services that operate between these two positions. It provides the strategic and corporate support to:

1. allow our current church systems around people, finances and property to be clear, transparent and accountable; and
2. at the direction of the church, assist in the release of resources to support the dreaming and innovation required for new ways of being.

This annual report is designed to give you a snapshot of the ways we are working in these spaces and our achievements in 2015/16.

Our aim over the next 12 months is to continue to provide the broader church with services that are viable, responsible, continually improving and sustainable. We are putting in place systems to measure our progress and the next annual report will show how we are tracking against these goals.

We look forward to working with you to find our common path in the Together on the way, enriching community journey as the church grows, transforms and innovates.

**Rev Heather den Houting**  
General secretary

# The Synod office 2015/16 highlights and achievements



## Welcome to the annual report of the Synod office

As you'll see, the Synod office is committed to supporting the life and mission of the church across Queensland through the effective delivery of services.

This commitment is sustained by an understanding of the connection between the services provided by the women and men in this office and the wonderful variety of the church's ministries across the state.

The Synod office has listened closely to the discernment of the *Together on the way enriching community* process as expressed in Synod in Session.

It is shaping its work according to those priorities, and is ready to help the church engage with them and to be fruitful in its endeavours.

Denominations like the Uniting Church in Australia have become significant human organisations, with all the attendant complexities, but we are still charged to lay hold of our founding purpose—to be a sign and foretaste of the coming reign of God. Our life together is called to show the marks of a free and authentic human community.

I hope this report encourages you to reflect on your part in what God is seeking to fulfil in the world.

**Rev David Baker**  
Moderator



**Managed the placements and payroll of**

**289 ministry agents across Queensland**

and the payroll of 250 lay staff in congregations, Alex Park, Raymont Lodge and the Synod office.

**Other achievements:** In addition to internal HR support for the Synod office, the Human Resource team provides guidance to congregations and presbyteries, has defined key processes in relation to lay staff employment and supported the Governance Nominations and Remuneration Committee (GNRC). The review of ministry agent payment and benefits provided an opportunity for every ministry agent to share their views.



**27 young adults from rural and remote Queensland could be sponsored via fundraising to attend Easter Madness**

**Other achievements:** Online giving was launched in early 2015 on the Foundation website via a secure PayPal gateway.

Two Indigenous learning pathways and one refugee assistance grant were awarded as part of the \$10 for 10 appeal and the Reach Out appeal.



**Since the May 2016 launch of new Safe Ministry with Children resources there have been**

**24 training sessions; 530 participants; 100 congregations across Queensland**

**Other achievements:** In response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommendations and the Assembly Interim Redress Framework, the Queensland Synod Interim Redress Procedure was finalised and is due to commence during the second half of 2016.



**180 groups stayed at Alexandra Park Conference Centre**

**50% were schools**

A further 17% were from other church and interdenominational groups.

Acacia accommodation was upgraded, including a refit of amenities and division of larger dormitory rooms into two eight-bed rooms.

Further work was done to develop the missional and future usage options for the site.



**28 scholarships for ministry workers in a post-graduate Certificate in Christian Leadership**

A further 45 participants were sponsored to attend the 2015 Global Leadership Summit to support the development of leadership capacity across the church.



## **90 chaplains were supported across Queensland**

The Chaplaincy Commission provided support to ministries across seven diverse sectors: health; aged care; education; tourism, sport and recreation; human services including prison ministry and First Peoples prison ministry; police and emergency services; and defence. New placements commenced with Scots PGC, Shalom Christian College and the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital. Together with the Bremer Brisbane Presbytery, the Chaplaincy Commission was able to increase funding to support the Active Faith project and chaplaincy at the University of Queensland, St Lucia.



## **80+ people attended Trinity Theological College's first open night in June 2016**

A Uniting Communications marketing campaign saw 38 new enrolments in 2016 in adult faith education, chaplaincy and pastoral care, graduate study and postgraduate study.

Seven candidates for ministry graduated in 2015/16 and 40 lay education courses were completed as part of the Lay Preachers Award.

Dr Leigh Trevaskis was appointed as the Director of Education for Ministry in March 2016. The college is now working towards the Future Ministry Model that aims to increase its capacity to contribute to church mission through aspirational models in the areas of preaching, teaching, and academia. A new program for lay education is being developed for 2017 and beyond.



## **Provided student accommodation for residents from 22 Countries**

including all mainland Australian states and territories, undertaking courses over 8 campuses across Brisbane.

Raymont Lodge Residential College completed a major upgrade project to improve bathrooms, plaster and paint walls and replace carpets.



## **2 new delegations and authorisations policies were created**

to enable increased operational efficiency in supporting UnitingCare Queensland's constitutional and governance reforms.



## **Provided strategic, culture and governance support to 18 schools and residential colleges, covering 17 500 students and 1000 staff**

The Schools and Residential Colleges Commission has established an ecumenical chaplains' network, a governance matrix and constitution development processes, and support documentation including handbooks and guidelines. The commission has run a workshop for senior leaders, participated in principal and senior executive selection panels and worked with the Chaplaincy Commission to secure and place chaplains in schools.



## **58 congregations visited and 589 risk improvement recommendations**

**Other achievements:** The Synod insurance team worked with our broker to arrange new medical malpractice insurance after the previous insurer advised their exit from this market. This cover was arranged at the expiring terms and conditions.



## **70 congregational communicators trained across 3 Communications Roadshows at the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Rockhampton**

Uniting Communications now writes, edits and produces content for 1300 Uniting News subscribers, 1770 Facebook followers, 650 Twitter followers, and a growing audience on Google+ and LinkedIn. 14 700 copies of *Journey* are printed every month and the team has begun a transition towards a 'digital first' focus via *Journey Online*.

Every fortnight the Reach Out Speak Out social responsibility newsletter reaches 123 subscribers and the Uniting Green newsletter reaches 252 subscribers.



## **12 900 paper statements and financial notifications are now sent electronically every year**

**Other achievements:** In line with Finance, Investment and Property Board recommendations, we increased interest rates paid to investors with U.C.I.S, providing an increased return to congregations and agencies but decreasing the margin in treasury. We restructured our agency loans, providing a return to the agency while also returning capital into the treasury. We reviewed the way we manage investments, making changes to our liquidity policy and progressing towards a revised Synod investment policy.



**99.1%** uptime for the Synod office IT systems

Responded to

**1415** requests for Help Desk assistance

The Information Technology team developed a custom software application to share the information in the Synod's relationships database. This corporate directory UConnect 2.0 is now accessible to active or retired ministerial agents as well as people with active reportable positions.



**299** property proposals submitted to the FIP Board

These included building, development, demolition, renovation, funding, sale, purchase, leasing, licensing and commercial matters.

Significant strategic work relating to utilisation of church property throughout Queensland continued, requiring ongoing liaison with local and state government and close relationships with presbyteries and congregations.



Partnered with **3** presbyteries to run **2** Mission Shaped Ministry courses

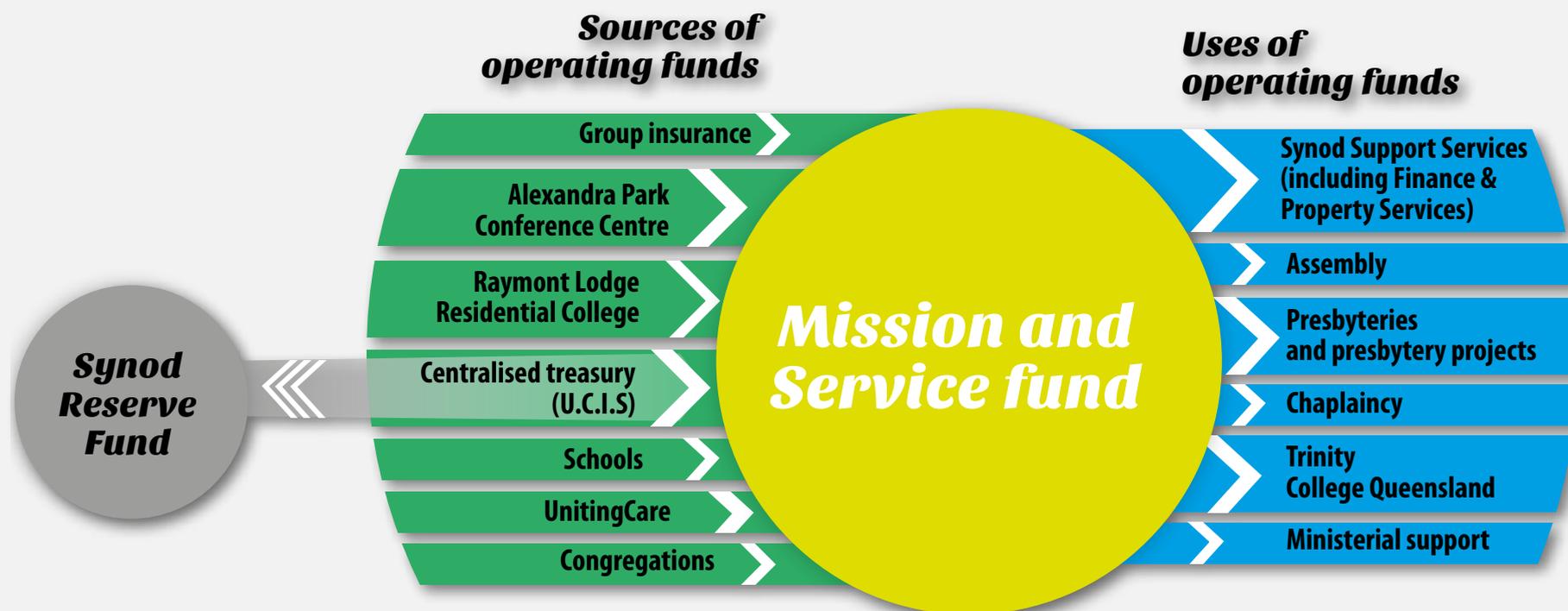
Across 24 modules of practical group learning, 35 participants explored what would be involved in starting a fresh expression of 'church' in their local setting, for new mission opportunities or developing new connections with the community.



## Synod office funds flow

The Synod office conducts a diverse range of activities to serve and support the Uniting Church in Queensland. Some activities generate funds for the Mission and Service Fund, some use funds from the Mission and Service Fund. The picture below explains how the funds flow and demonstrates that the Church is indeed one body with many parts—all contributing to the growth, transition and innovation of the church.

Any shortfalls in the Mission and Service Fund are covered by surpluses from the centralised treasury function and any remaining surpluses are transferred annually to the Synod Reserve Fund which is being rebuilt to cover possible future emergency situations.



# Synod office financial snapshot

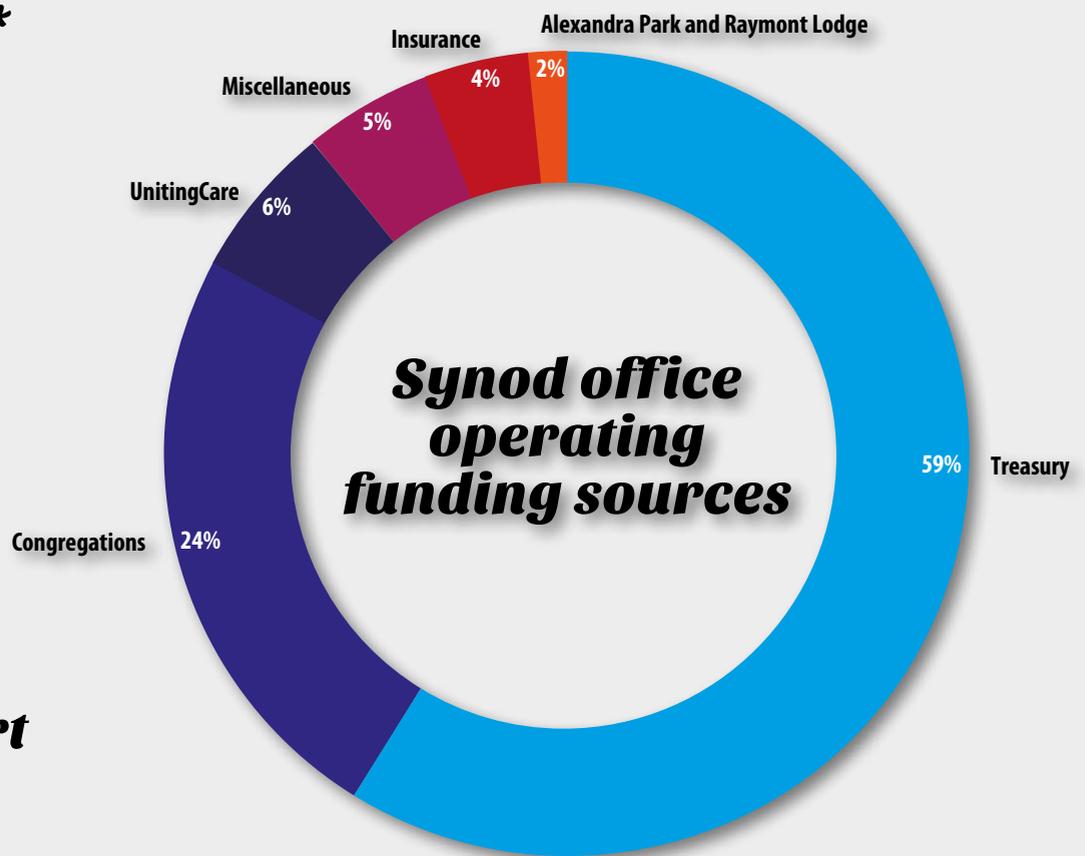
## 2015/16 Operating result\*

The 2016 preliminary year end result is \$4.6m, which is \$1.7m better than budget.

This year the Treasury (U.C.I.S) result was lower than previous years due to tightened interest margins and lower returns from investment markets. This was offset by deferred project costs and savings in administration and overheads expenditure, resulting in an overall favourable result compared to budget.

The shortfalls in mission funding continue to be covered by surpluses achieved in Treasury (U.C.I.S) operations.

\* The 2015-16 accounts are unaudited. The audited annual financial statements will be available following endorsement by the FIP Board at its October 2016 meeting.



## Your questions answered:

### 'What does Synod Support funding include?'

#### Shared services

Shared services functions support the activities of the whole church across Queensland, including the activities of agencies, for example payroll and insurance.

#### Legal and governance

Legal and governance functions ensure the Synod's compliance with internal and external requirements. Internal compliance resources Synod committees and commissions of the church to follow endorsed processes, such as safe ministry with children, placement processes, disciplinary committees, sexual misconduct processes. External compliance includes legislative requirements and reporting, such as BAS returns, FBT processing, ACNC submissions, paralegal support relating to property matters.

#### Communications

Uniting Communications manages the reputation and brand of the Queensland Synod, shares news and content to inform and inspire the church, and provides fundraising and marketing support.

#### Synod support

Synod support functions service the efficient operations of the Synod office, including IT and system support and accounts processing.

#### Strategic projects

Strategic project support includes resourcing leadership and mission development, coordinating National Church Life Survey participation, youth ministry (such as Summer Madness and discipleship strategy), consultation with presbyteries and review and development of priority directions for the Synod.

#### Administration support

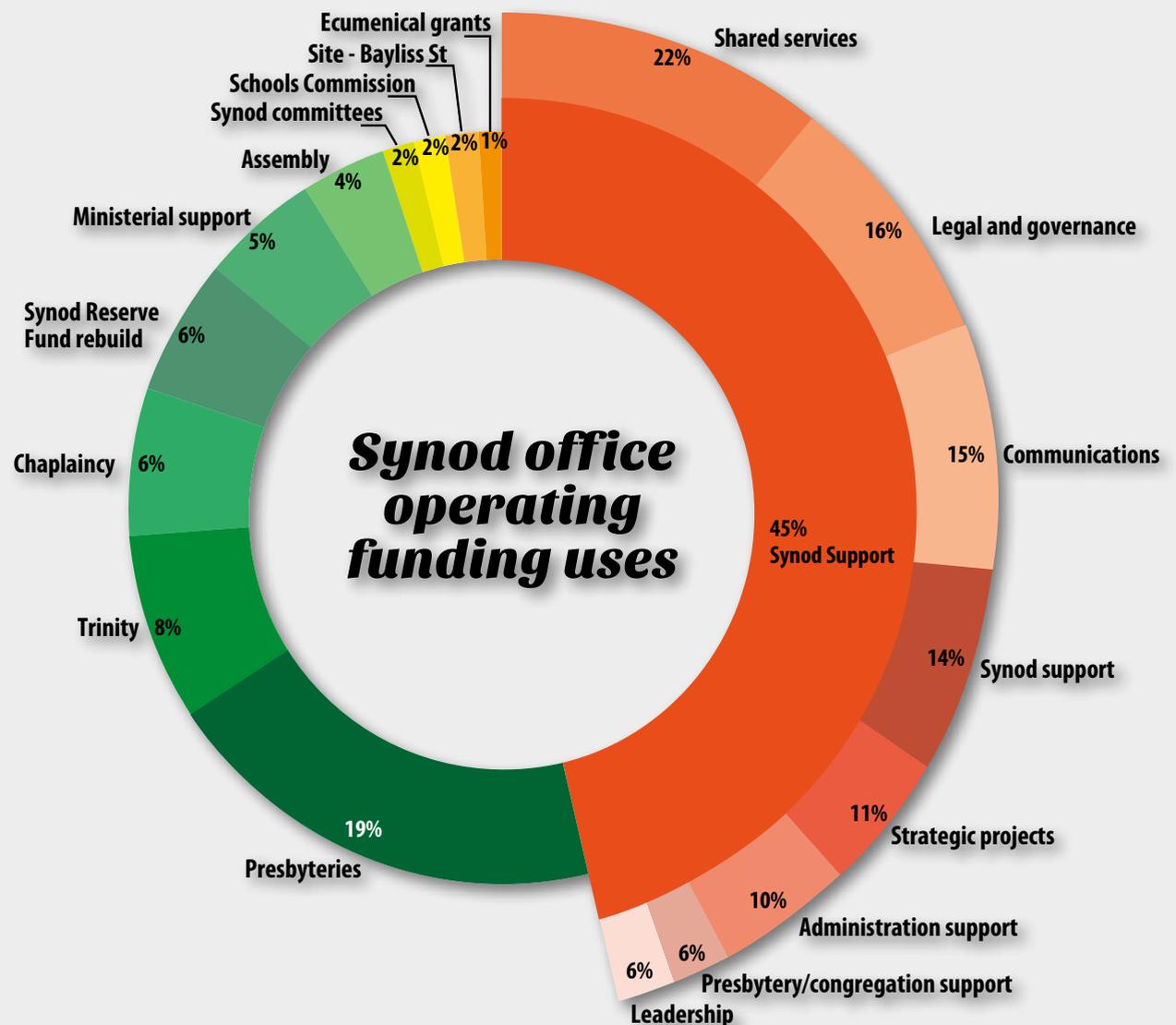
Administration support represents the first point of contact for most enquiries to the Synod office, and includes reception staff and executive assistants.

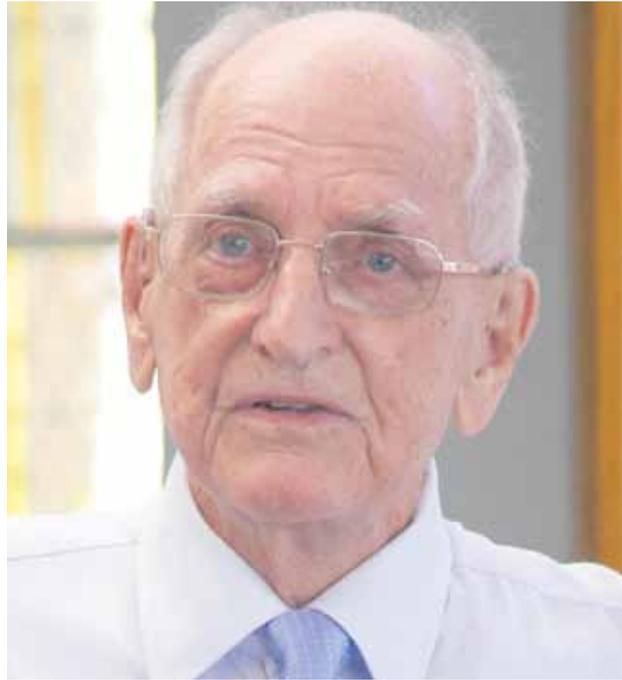
#### Presbytery/congregation support

Presbytery and congregation support provides assistance and responds to enquiries from congregation treasurers and presbytery ministers, in activities including risk assessments and recommendations, processing grant applications and providing guidance for Treasurer functions.

#### Leadership

The Executive Management team provides leadership and direction to the Synod office in delivering outcomes and includes the General Secretary, Moderator and Director of Finance and Property Services.





Left: Church chairperson Rachel Reese  
 Right: Church secretary Rev Alan Renton  
 Photos: Supplied

# Small is beautiful: our church on Maggie Island

A small congregation in one of Queensland’s iconic tourist destinations is demonstrating the power of the Gospel to draw people together. **Dianne Jensen** talks to members of the Magnetic Island Uniting Church.

**Christians from all denominations and none have found a church home at the Uniting Church on Magnetic Island, a tiny piece of paradise just off Townsville.**

There hasn’t been a minister in placement for 10 years, and the regular congregation of around 25 people share responsibility for keeping things running. It’s the only church on the island open every Sunday morning, with plenty of visitors dropping in.

Retired minister and church secretary Rev Alan Renton and his wife Shirley moved to the island 20 years ago.

“On an island, people come because our church suits them, not because of previous denominational allegiances,” says Alan. “Inevitably we come from many different theological standpoints—fundamentalist, liberal and everything

in-between. Together we are the most Christian, most loving and caring congregation that I have ever experienced.”

Church chairperson Rachel Reese, a United States Southern Baptist, opted for the beach lifestyle when work took her to Townsville.

“I love the variety in this church,” she says. “It’s amazing how we can all read the same passage and each of us notices or is drawn to a different part—all part of the one same truth, but viewed through different experiences, stages in life and cultural backgrounds. Put it all together, and we are closer to the true kingdom of God.”

As in the early church, at Magnetic Island there are no committees and everything comes before the congregation for discussion.

“People pitch in and help where they can—with preaching, visiting the ill, morning tea and leading

children’s lessons. We find when there is a need, someone seems to come along just when needed,” says Rachel.

The church has a craft group, a small Sunday School, and shares ecumenical Religion Instruction in the local primary school. There are plans for a school holiday program.

They’ve also established a partnership with the Catholic church in Paikgacha, a Christian village in Bangladesh, sponsoring the education of orphans being cared for by local families.

With some elderly members in declining health, the congregation is now hoping to share this ministry with other Uniting Churches and individuals. In the interim, the tiny community has stepped out in faith to guarantee the funds for 2017.

*To find out more about the Paikgacha project contact Rev Alan Renton on (07) 4758 1205 or [alanrenton@dodo.com.au](mailto:alanrenton@dodo.com.au)*

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# Superhuman singer:

## Tony Dee

Tony Dee with The Superhuman Band  
Photo: Channel 4

Behind the jaw dropping feel-good anthem of the 2016 Rio Paralympics is local Brisbane musician Tony Dee: Queensland Baptist client service officer by day, superhuman singer by night. **Ashley Thompson** talks to Tony about faith, music and disability inclusiveness.

“  
I want to be known as someone who encourages and puts a smile on people’s faces through my music

**Launched in July, United Kingdom broadcaster Channel 4’s promotional trailer for the September 2016 Paralympics “We’re the superhumans” has reached extraordinary levels of online success: amassing over 33 million views across all of its social platforms with an impressive 2.16 per cent Twitter engagement rate—the latter figure eclipsing BBC Sport’s Rio Olympics campaign trailer “The greatest show on earth”.**

While these social insights may sound meaningless to anyone outside the advertising industry, they are having a profound impact on one Brisbane local: Tony Doevendans, known professionally by his stage name Tony Dee.

In a worldwide search for a lead singer to cover Sammy Davis Jr’s triumphant “Yes I Can”, Tony—a wheelchair-user born with spina bifida—was chosen from thousands of applicants to front The Superhuman Band ensemble and spectacularly styled musical ad.

A worship leader and musical theatre amateur, Tony has been singing in charismatic Queensland Baptist and

Pentecostal congregations for nearly 25 years. Since his international debut, Tony—who currently attends Nexus Church in north Brisbane—has featured in *The Guardian*, *The Courier Mail*, ABC News, *The Catholic Leader*, *Coaching Life* magazine, The QB and Channel 7’s morning show *Sunrise* to name a few—an overwhelming amount of press for the self-proclaimed introvert.

“I want to be known as someone who encourages and puts a smile on people’s faces through my music,” Tony says simply. “The Paralympics is certainly one good outlet for showing people what people with disability are capable of, it’s not the only one but it’s a good one.”

To Tony, disability bears little mention when asked to describe himself—words like husband, father, musician and Jesus-follower taking precedence.

### Gotta testify

Like many who grew up in a Christian family, Tony went through “what some might call the usual teenager rebellious years”.

“I don’t know whether it was rebellion or more I just didn’t really understand God from a personal or loving point of view,” reflects Tony. “I thought God was out to get me or just ready to jump on my mistakes.”

Kept in church only by his obligation to run the overhead projector during worship, it wasn’t until a visiting preacher talked about “trying to live the Christian life without Christ” that Tony realised he was “trying to do everything in [his] own strength” and that “God actually had to be a part of [his] life in order to help him”.

“For many years I struggled with [my disability] and would have liked to have had different circumstances,” says Tony. “For a while I saw it as an excuse to believe that God didn’t really love me—but that sort of went out the window when I had so much proof that God loves me for who I am.”

From this moment on, prayer and quiet time for Tony no longer became about “earning God’s approval” but rather a desire to spend time with him.

Following a career in administration at Youth with a Mission and at his local church office, in 2004 Tony proposed to his now wife Caroline the day after he was offered a job in finance at the Queensland Baptist head office, becoming, in the process, a step-father to her two young children.

While it may be surprising to anyone who has heard Tony sing that he’d be earning his living any other way, he explains: “It’s a process. With a part-time job and part-disability pension I have to watch what I earn and report it.”

Equipment and licensing are also a consideration, yet Tony can hardly hide his excitement when speaking of the future, “I want to record, I’d love to record”.

### Respect, just a little bit

For those who have witnessed the slow but increasing representation of people with disability in Australian media, few could forget late Australian comedian and disability rights activist Stella Young’s ingenious TEDxSydney Talk “I’m not your inspiration, thank you very much”.

Like Tony Doevendans, Stella used a wheelchair most of her life but was otherwise, in her own opinion, unremarkable. Yet Stella constantly found herself being congratulated by strangers for “simply existing” and was not okay with being objectified for what she called “inspiration porn”.

“I have a little trouble with the inspiring tag,” Tony agrees. “Years ago I remember being told, ‘Oh isn’t it good to see someone like you out and about’ because, you know, I drove my car.”

“It should be just assumed we can get out and about and if we can’t then there’s something wrong with the way the community is functioning.”

Tony speaks highly of the churches he has attended for their inclusion of people with disability—which to

him relies heavily on wheelchair accessibility and the consideration of his fellow congregation members.

In addition to being consulted in the planning of church extensions, Tony also appreciates it when people do things like “move chairs out of the way so I can be part of the congregation and not stick out on the side”.

“One thing I’d steer clear of if I were an [able-bodied] congregation member is asking to pray for people with visible disabilities. I’ve had complete strangers at churches I’ve visited for the first time say to me, ‘I believe God’s going to heal you in the next week’.

“It’s not ‘off-putting’—because you can’t put me off God—but it puts a bit of a burden in the heart.”

Tony also recommends exercising caution for those who have the burning desire to ask “how did it happen?”

“I know one guy who lost his arm in an industrial accident and so [that question] can be very traumatic, it can be like asking the person to relive the incident if they lost an ability accidentally.

“At least have a relationship before you go asking questions like that.”

Other faux pas include verbose stances on either side of the abortion debate in the presence of a person with disability, particularly where a disability has been identified in a foetus.

“I was at a pro-life rally and somebody said to me, ‘It’s better than being dead, eh!’ and I said, ‘Well yeah it is, thank you very much’.

“There’s always other means of support available—even if they may be at first hard to see—for the child to be raised to live a good and healthy and worthwhile life.”

In general Tony is empathetic towards the curiosity of strangers. For the persistently nosy however, *Journey* recommends the wheelchair episode of ABC iView’s *You Can’t Ask That* series.

### Take me to church

Surprisingly, but consistent with character, when asked what attributes he looked for when choosing a church, wheelchair accessibility doesn’t garner a mention.

“I’d say good biblical teaching, vibrant worship accessible to everybody (young or old) and a church where when people pray they expect answers,” says Tony. “As opposed to it just being something you do.”

In a behind-the-scenes exclusive of the “We’re the Superhumans” campaign, Tony Doevendans told Channel 4, “The point of superhuman is saying to me, I can do so much more than I ever dreamed or expected.”

What he may have added upon deeper probing is “through Christ, who gives me strength”.

*Watch the 2016 Rio Paralympics trailer on the UK Channel 4’s Facebook page or YouTube channel. Free-to-air coverage of the games will be held 7–18 September on the Seven Network. Follow Tony Dee’s singing career at [facebook.com/tonydeemusic](https://www.facebook.com/tonydeemusic)*

“

The Paralympics is certainly one good outlet for showing people what people with disability are capable of



# Mission-Ready (or not)

The *Basis of Union* may have been completed in the late sixties but it provides an ongoing instrument of renewal and encouragement. **Rev Prof Andrew Dutney** reflects on the Uniting Church in Australia's foundational document's past and what it offers us in the present.

“

And so, in theological education, it is the *Basis of Union* that has been encouraging us across the Uniting Church to recognise that a missional church must be served and led by mission-oriented ministers

**It's no secret I'm a fan of the *Basis of Union*. But I also realise that it didn't get everything right. It used sexist language. It made no reference to Australia's First Peoples. It didn't use the words "peace" or "justice" anywhere, in spite of its orientation towards "the promised end".**

All of these "mistakes" (there are others too) can be explained by the fact that it's an historic document: they weren't mistakes in 1968. And it wasn't a mistake in 1968 that the *Basis of Union* assumed that all Uniting Church ministers would be selected and educated to be scholarly, teaching pastors in the Reformed tradition (rather than itinerant, prophetic preachers in the Evangelical tradition).

It wasn't a mistake then, but it would be now if we didn't insist on a discernment-selection-education process that produces mission-ready ordinands who are passionate, Christ-centred, resilient, innovative leaders.

I was recently quoted as saying that, "There are things about the *Basis of Union* and about the Uniting Church, which are so ideally suited to where the church is, at the beginning of the 21st Century, that I have no question about the providential hand of God guiding decisions that were made and insights that were gained, and even some of the awful politicking that went on—it came out in ways that are a real blessing to us."

The deeply missiological character of the *Basis of Union* ticks all the boxes in its account of the Christian faith and church order, but it does that in a way which puts it all at the service of mission.

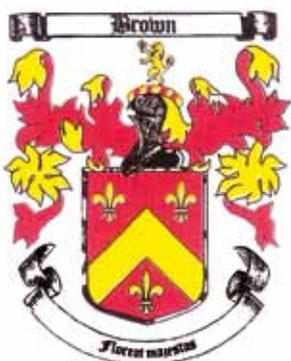
Union was supposed to be about the renewal of the church in faith and mission, so the *Basis of Union* was designed to be an instrument that the Holy Spirit would use to renew the church, not just at the time of union, but in an ongoing way. It blesses us with a tremendous capacity for flexibility and innovation, for the sake of mission.

And so, in theological education, it is the *Basis of Union* that has been encouraging us across the Uniting Church to recognise that a missional church must be served and led by mission-oriented ministers. It also encourages us to reshape educational processes to cooperate with, enhance and deepen this calling and these gifts in our ordination candidates.

I'm a fan of this new movement in theological education because I'm a fan of the *Basis of Union*.

**Rev Prof Andrew Dutney**

*Rev Prof Andrew Dutney teaches Systematic Theology within the Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University. He is the Principal of Uniting College for Leadership and Theology. His most recent publications Manifesto for Renewal and The Basis of Union: A Commentary are available from [mediacomeshop.org.au](http://mediacomeshop.org.au)*



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# 5 faith-themed classics to celebrate International Literacy Day

International Literacy Day (8 September) raises awareness of the vital role literacy plays in achieving global development and social justice. From finding employment to understanding health information, literacy skills are the keys to unlocking a better future.

To get people thinking about the written word and the enjoyment reading can bring, **Trinity Theological Library** has put together a list of five faith-themed classics to get your eyes away from the television and into a book.

**1 *Fear and Trembling* by Søren Kierkegaard.**  
Published in 1843 under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, *Fear and Trembling* restages the wonder and horror of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Through creative re-interpretation and lyrical staging of a familiar biblical story, the book explores the limits of ethics, the difficulty of faith, and the silence of the self's relation to God.

**2 *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis**  
The classic loved by children and adults alike, C.S. Lewis' series of seven fantasy novels uses the adventures of children to explore good and evil. Through this series, the author significantly influenced the development of post-WWII literature for children.

**3 *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* by Henri Nouwen**  
Countless people have experienced the spiritual discernment of Nouwen. Arguably his most widely read book, his understanding of leadership as a community calling has made this a go-to guide for all in ministry.

**4 *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan**  
The insight with which Bunyan explored the topic of pastoral ministry through the narrative of a Christian allegory makes this book as relevant today as it was when Bunyan wrote it in his prison cell in 1678.

**5 *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**  
This 1937 publication by the German theologian during the Nazi regime details his understanding of what it means to follow Christ through the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Considered one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century, Bonhoeffer's writings on ethics, humanism, and social responsibility push readers to consider a Gospel-inspired style of leadership for today's church.

All titles are available from Trinity Theological Library: [library.trinity.qld.edu.au](http://library.trinity.qld.edu.au)



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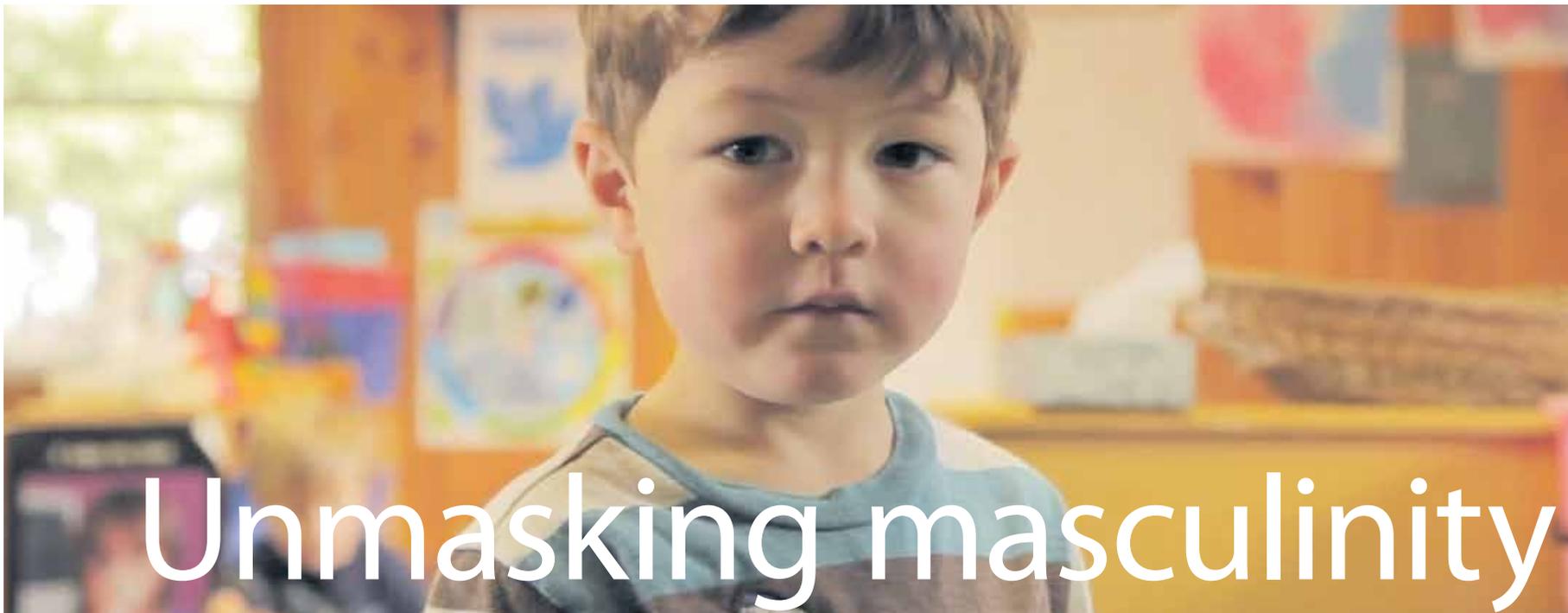


Photo: The Representation Project

# Unmasking masculinity

Is the overwhelming dominance of hyper-masculinity in media harmful to not only the male psyche but community safety? American documentary filmmaker director Jennifer Siebel Newsom would have you believe so.

***The Mask You Live In***  
Director: Jennifer Siebel Newsom  
2015, rated MA15+  
Available on Netflix Australia

**Following The Representation Project's 2011 documentary *Miss Representation*—Jennifer Siebel Newsom is back exploring how limited gender stereotypes in media also contribute to a wide range of behavioural disorders among men and boys in *The Mask You Live In*.**

Fading into the poignant George Orwell quote “he wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it,” the film opens on motivational speaker (and former NFL defensive lineman) Joe Ehrmann discussing how he used football to “manifest hyper-masculinity” and gain the respect of his father.

“Be a man: That’s one of the most destructive phrases in this culture, I believe,” says Joe recalling its use in his earliest memory of his father.

“Don’t cry”, “be cool”, “you little b\*tch”, “get laid”, “grow some balls”. This collated regurgitation of phrases boys are fed from adolescence is as alarming as the evidenced male archetypes prevalent in mainstream media.

According to political scientist Dr Caroline Heldman, these include the “strong, silent guy who is always in control and not emotional”, the violent superhero, the thug and the “man-child” who degrades women for humour and engages in high-risk activities.

The documentary cites unreferenced statistics that claim the average male consumes 40 hours of film and

television a week notwithstanding 15 hours of violent video games. Accompanied by emotive music and images, audience members are encouraged to connect this toxic culture of hyper-masculinity to male-shooter mass killings, alcoholism, drug addition, gang rape and suicide.

With high-production values albeit in the service of a formulaic documentary-style, *The Mask You Live In* is an admirable educational tool full of positive male role-models who share a desire to discuss the symptoms of violence and self-harm—loneliness, depression and an inability to express emotion.

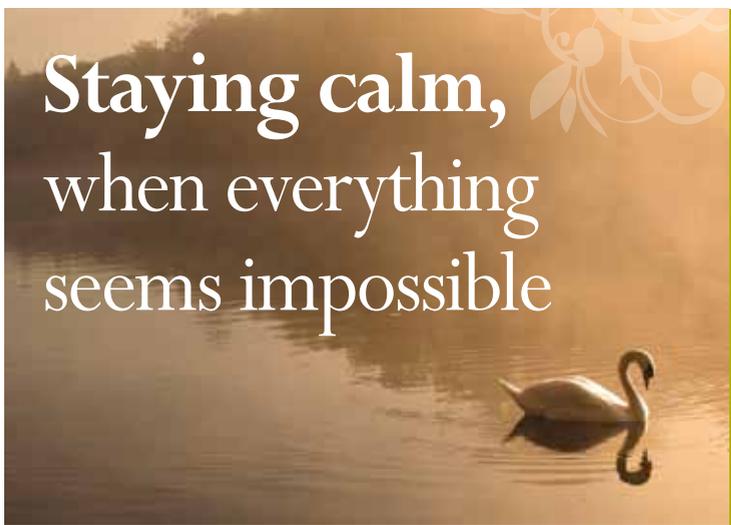
However, while the insights of academics and personal stories of educators are believable, what is not believable is that no opposing views exist. Even more concerning is a lack of reference to the other leading cause of gun violence: accessibility.

Indeed focusing on the individual mental health issues behind shooters without reference to American gun-control makes this film subtle collateral for the pro-gun movement.

Ultimately *The Mask You Live In* delves into cultural issues worth discussing for the benefit of the next generation’s mental health but is reductive in its correlation to shootings, displaying a lack of complexity that makes the film good but not great.

**Ashley Thompson**

*The Mask You Live In is now available on Netflix Australia.*



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## R U OK Day?

R U OK? Day (8 September) draws attention to issues of suicide and depression by encouraging everyone to ask their network of family, friends and colleagues 'are you ok?' and provide meaningful support to those struggling.

Created by the late marketing executive Gavin Larkin in 2000, the campaign was inspired by his own father's suicide with the mission to protect others from the pain his family endured due to the tragedy. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, about seven people take their own lives every day in Australia and 65 000 people attempt suicide annually. Alarming, suicide is the biggest killer of Australians aged under 44 years.

Beyond asking the question to those around you, other ways to contribute to the campaign include hosting an event such as a sausage sizzle or morning tea, tagging #ruok and #ruokday on photos and posts on social media, putting up posters in your workplace or school and creating "Conversation Corners" with themed decorations where people can talk.

For more information visit [ruok.org.au](http://ruok.org.au)  
Resources around suicide and mental health issues are available from [ucaqld.com.au/calledtocare](http://ucaqld.com.au/calledtocare)

## Dementia Awareness Month and World Alzheimer's Day

September is Dementia Awareness Month and a series of seminars featuring international and local dementia experts and keynote speakers will be held to better inform Queenslanders of the disability and what life is like for those living with it. Additionally, World Alzheimer's Day (21 September) is an international awareness-raising day about Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia.

Over 350 000 Australians live with dementia and that number is expected to increase to 400 000 in less than five years and by 2050 reach 900 000, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. There is no cure for dementia and it accounts for the single greatest cause of disability in older Australians.

As part of Dementia Awareness Month, Dr Ron Petersen—director of the Mayo Clinic Alzheimer's Disease Research Center and the Mayo Clinic Study of Aging—will present latest research and findings as well as United States and global experiences in establishing a national dementia strategy, at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre on 20 September. Tickets are \$20, which includes a morning tea served on arrival.

For more information on dementia visit [fightdementia.org.au](http://fightdementia.org.au)

For information on Dr Ron Petersen's presentation visit [qld.fightdementia.org.au/qld/dementia-awareness-month](http://qld.fightdementia.org.au/qld/dementia-awareness-month)

## Season of Creation

For four Sundays in September, the Season of Creation celebrates Christ, the creator, and the wonders of creation. On 1 September, Christians around the world mark Creation Day and then Ocean, Fauna and Flora, Storm and Cosmos for the month's Sundays, with a commitment to a ministry of healing earth, with Christ and creation as partners.

You may wish to integrate elements of the creation story into your worship, or get involved in your local community to plant trees, devise water-saving methods from rainfall or simply start a conversation with others on how to use green power where possible.

For more information, including worship resources and practical ministry ideas, visit [seasonofcreation.com](http://seasonofcreation.com)



Melinda Tankard Reist  
Photo: Supplied

## Trinity Unchained presents *Too much too young?*

How do teenagers and parents navigate the abundance of sexual imagery in popular culture? Modern day families looking for answers are invited to join the conversation with noted author, media commentator and advocate for women and girls, Melinda Tankard Reist.

Two sessions hosted by Melinda will be held on 7 October (7 pm–9.30 pm) at Calvary Christian College, one for youth only around navigating a sexed-up world, and another for adults only on the sexualisation of teenagers and what can be done about it.

Bookings are essential. Tickets cost \$10 per adult and \$5 per child (12–17 years), or \$20 per family (two adults and two children).

For more information or to book tickets visit [trinity.qld.edu.au](http://trinity.qld.edu.au)



## Prayer Retreat: Encountering God

Want to deepen your prayer life from talking to God, to being with God? Go beyond words at the three-day residential retreat to find out how many Christians throughout the ages have sought God in silence through contemplative prayer.

**Retreat leader:** Dr Neil Preston  
**Date:** 7–9 October 2016

**Venue:** Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre, Ormiston, Brisbane  
**Bookings close:** 30 September 2016

Dr Neil Preston is an organisational psychologist and coordinator of the Centring Prayer Network in Western Australia.

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**Enquiries:**  
[kristine.bromiley@ucaqld.com.au](mailto:kristine.bromiley@ucaqld.com.au)



## The Scoop

Journeyonline.com.au/scoop

### What if every church...

In the first edition of an ongoing exclusive column for *The Scoop*, **Scott Guyatt** explores the possibilities of what could happen if every church embraced a particular concept or innovation. This month: the kids' playground.

### Tips for reuniting agencies and congregations

Following her Unchained session at the 32nd Synod exploring the relationship between congregations and agencies, **Rev Linda Hamill** outlines some practical ways to strengthen the ties.

### Book review: *Built for Change*

Rev Dr Steve Taylor's latest book explores the practical theology of innovation with a focus on collaboration and leadership. **Rev Peter Armstrong** reviews.

### Film review: *Ghostbusters*

A storm of controversy has gathered around the all-female reboot of the 1980s classic *Ghostbusters*: feminists have championed it, staunch critics have seen it as little more than Hollywood virtue-signalling. **Ashley Thompson** visits the cinema to see what lies beneath all the hype.

# To the editor

Last month's *Journey* made me thankful for my Trinity Theological education once again. Lecturers like Rev Dr Geoff Thompson helped us navigate the extremes of Christianity exemplified by Ken Ham (fundamentalism) and Val Webb (progressivism).

Both positions are responding to the same perceived problem. Both make the same mistake. Both bow to the idol of the enlightenment—science—mistakenly believing that for something to be true, it must be scientifically true. Thus we either “beef up” our Bible to be “more scientific than science” or we “water down” our Bible so only that which survives the scrutiny of science survives.

Science is not the final arbiter of truth. It is simply one of the important dimensions to truth like history, art, philosophy and even theology. Once we discover Scientism has no clothes, it frees us from these extremes. We can discover again the most profound thing—the truth is a person (John 14:6).

**Rev Paul Clark**  
Redcliffe Uniting Church

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I appreciated the article regarding Ken Ham and the Ark Encounter, and the editor's comments regarding the very different perspectives on faith.

My own experience is that the further I went down the “liberal” road of interpreting the scriptures, the more I was convinced that it was a dead end; going nowhere and with no real answers. It was only when I got back to accepting the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God that it really opened up to me and brought the revelation, and the answers that we need especially in these times.

As Ken Ham says, you don't need to believe the Genesis record of Creation to be a Christian. However if you don't, it will limit the depths to which you can go in understanding the fullness of our redemption. If you don't know what was lost at the Fall, you will not understand all that the Cross restored.

It is however, essential to believe in the resurrection. Accepting the Lordship of Christ and believing in his resurrection is necessary for salvation according to the Bible (Romans 10:9).

There is plenty of literature containing evidence for the great worldwide flood. The ark was not some dinky little boat such as on the cover. It was a huge barge three stories high.

Jesus said that God's word is truth (John 17:17). Thinking that we know better than God is how the world got into this mess: believing God's word is the way back. Jesus said that he came to bear witness to the truth. That then is what we should be doing; not making people comfortable in unbelief.

**Val Pym**  
Iona West Uniting Church

Congratulations on highlighting Partners in Ministry (PIM) in the August edition of *Journey*.

You have highlighted some partners who have attended the annual PIM weekend, and this I see as only the tip of the story available. As a PIM who has attended PIM weekends at Margate in the late 1990s it looks like the weekend has changed for the better, most attendees then were “traditional ministers' wives” who had married into the job.

One item you could take up with partners in a future article is, “Who looks after the spiritual needs of partners in ministry?”

I was either the token male or accompanied by one other at these weekends, and did not see much reason for continuing to go to these weekends. This combined with moving to the north of the Tropic of Capricorn with my wife left me with minimal contact with other partners in ministry.

In the congregations where my wife ministered I did my own thing as a member of the congregation as those highlighted in your article. I still take an active part in the congregation where we worship.

While initially I received invitations personally as a PIM in the mail to both a Synod PIM function and PIM weekend, with the advent of email in later years it has been via communications to my minister wife.

Now that my wife has retired and is not on ministers in placement mailing lists, it is as if I and possibly all other retired ministers spouses no longer exist in the Queensland Synod, although I understand I still appear in Uconnect with my contact details.

**Ken Whyte**  
Kenmore

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*Journey* has improved out of sight in the last few editions! It is possible to read the magazine now and actually believe there is something else worthy of Christian comment other than refugees and asylum seekers. It is possible to discover and imbibe more than one theological standpoint—your juxtaposition of Ken Ham and Val Webb in the August edition being an example of this. It is possible to find both the scriptural and the social in substantial measure; to read the magazine and be better informed about the Word as well as about the contemporary church.

The Uniting Church by its very nature and charter (the *Basis of Union*) is a broad and inclusive church. One of its great pastoral strengths is the capacity to love and not to excise those with differences of opinion on matters not essential to the faith, for Christ's sake.

The latest iteration of *Journey* at least attempts to capture something of that breadth. There is still a way to go and almost by definition you will not always please everyone. But (to use a culinary metaphor) there is now a broader menu for a more diverse range of palates on offer. You may find yourself satisfying an increasing number of diners.

**Jim Pearson**  
Emerald

Thank you for an interesting August edition of *Journey*.

I read with some dismay about a science teacher whose literal interpretation of scripture leads him to suspend the enquiring mind of the scientist in the area of theology.

A couple of pages over, I was delighted to read about another teacher who brought her enquiring mind to other areas of life, including her theology. How refreshing to find an explanation of “contextual theology” that encourages me to look at the context of my life and the lives of others in the 21st century, as I develop a theology that includes my reason and experiences as well as scripture and tradition.

It is indeed liberating to know that I don’t have to stay boxed in by beliefs that belonged to the context of earlier generations and don’t allow for my enquiring and searching mind.

**Desley Garnett**  
New Farm

Thank you *Journey* for the article on Val Webb. I questioned and doubted. Val Webb gave me permission to doubt. I have returned to the church as a follower of Jesus knowing that questions, doubt, research and life experience have allowed me to continue my life journey being more loving and compassionate, striving always for justice and to endeavor truly to follow the teaching of Jesus.

**Barbara Davis**  
Manly West

Firstly let me say how much I enjoy reading your magazine. The articles are wide ranging and thought provoking.

Reading the first issue in the article “5 Global issues close to young hearts” in the August edition really resonated with me, “We have so much room ... we could easily take way more to help.”

I read this in the same week that *The Weekend Australian* (13–14 August edition) reported that Australia has accepted fewer than 2000 of a promised extra 12 000 Syrian refugees.

In contrast, Canada has welcomed over 29 000 Syrian refugees. In the past month, I have signed two petitions protesting the indefinite detention of Iranian asylum seekers who are justifiably afraid of returning to a repressive regime.

These young children have captured the essence of Matthew 25:35, “... I was a stranger, and ye took me in”, and Matthew 25:40, “And the King shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’”

As church communities and leaders we need to lobby our government with this simple message, “Let them come and let them stay”.

**Nell Stetner**  
Wynnum West

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

Thank you for last edition’s article, “Outside the comfort zone” with Val Webb.

For me, and for many people I associate with, both inside the church and in self-imposed exile from the church, this recognition of the value of a critically thinking and contemporary literate lay people is taking far too long to be facilitated and normalised.

It is not too late for the church to acknowledge the importance of doubt, experience and reason in each individual’s life and spiritual journey. A church that invests in demythologising Jesus and the gospels and shakes off the stultifying impact of imposed literalism will stand a better chance of receiving acceptance by a well-educated world that is rapidly unpacking the church’s relevance and dismissing it from their lives.

**Dr Paul Inglis**  
Dayboro

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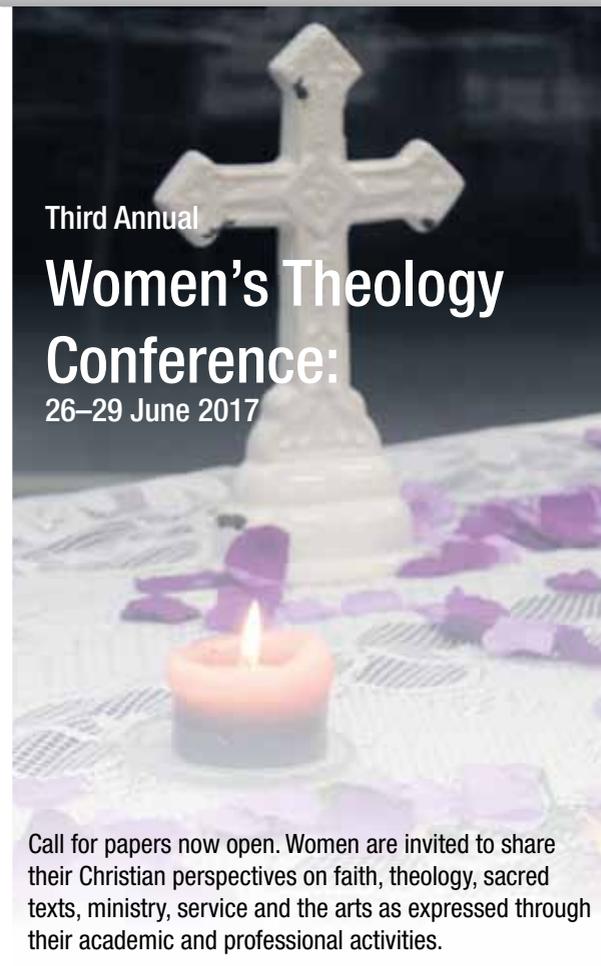
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