



Uniting Church in Australia
Western Australia

Issue 73
September 2021

Revive

a fresh perspective on faith, church and life



Building a
culture of safety

Leading with
creativity
and hope:
Rev Sharon Hollis

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Opinions expressed in *Revive* do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, or the policies of the Uniting Church.

Revive welcomes contributors. Contact the editor in the first instance at revive@wa.uca.org.au.

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Moderator

Looking forward, looking back

One of the great pleasures I have enjoyed in my first year as Moderator has been the opportunity to travel outside the metropolitan area into the wide expanses of this great state, and being able to meet with so many community leaders and congregations. Often, I have been overwhelmed by the tenacity and improvisation evident in people's lives. Even in the midst of flood, fire or cyclone, fatalism and defeat take a back seat to picking up the pieces and starting all over again.

On long Moderatorial journeys, the car radio has a lot of country and western music, such as Archie Roach or Paul Kelly, telling stories of love, pain, struggle, loss, suffering and hope. Their lyrics often sum up what ordinary people are thinking, even if not always expressed in language familiar to those of us within the church.

It is little wonder that four years after his death in 2003, more than seven million albums of the late much-loved Australian icon Slim Dusty were sold in Australia,

far outselling the Bible-songs describing in homespun lyrics something of our faith journey.

Making sense of what I've seen All the love we've had between You and I, along the track Looking forward, looking back.

So as my first Moderatorial year comes to a close, I have been 'looking back'. However, as I prepare now for my second year, I am 'looking forward', advancing the theme of 'Trusting in God', based on Romans 15.13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

I believe we are very privileged to be a part of the Uniting Church, in whatever capacity we participate. This was highlighted recently when I met with the principals and chaplains of our seven Uniting Church schools and the Chief Executive Officers of our aged and caring agencies.

I have shared a special day with 33 Ministers in Placement, as we examined the common elements of our ministry journey; our Pentecost Day service at Penrhos College, drew together so many from across the diversity of our church's life; and our ongoing engagement with



Susy Thomas
Moderator, Uniting Church WA

the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, have all been special moments in my Moderatorial journey thus far.

Currently we are in the planning stage for organising a Christmas together. The planned date is Sunday 12 December. More information will follow.

A particular highlight for me has been the regular meeting with the Heads of Churches, a unique engagement in the life of the church in WA, as we discover those things we have in common and how we can speak with one voice – to our own churches and to the wider community.

As your Moderator, I am privileged to represent the Uniting Church in so many different places and being afforded the opportunity to speak, not only as a follower of Jesus, but to tell the world of the great things the Uniting Church is undertaking in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I wish you all every blessing.

Susy Thomas
Moderator, Uniting Church WA

Moderator's Diary

September

- 7 September Presbytery Standing Committee
- 10 September WA Adult Fellowship AGM at South Perth Uniting Church
- 10 September Opening Worship of the 45th Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA
- 11-12 September Preaching at GKI Uniting Church, followed by Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) Sunday
- 19 September Perth College of Divinity Celebration Service

October

- 5 October Presbytery Standing Committee meeting
- 20 October Heads of Churches meeting
- 24 October Preaching at Scarborough Uniting Church

November

- 2 November Presbytery Standing Committee
- 7 November Preaching at Toodyay Uniting Church
- 13-14 November Preaching at Northcliffe and surrounding Uniting Churches
- 21 November Preaching at Mandurah Uniting Church
- 22-23 November UnitingCare Australia Leaders Forum in Canberra

This July and August, my teenage son and I – along with millions of other people online – spent a lot of time watching the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. My son himself competes in summer athletics, so we were pretty eager to see who would take out the 100m sprint in the first games since Usain Bolt's retirement.

While we watched a lot of athletic events (and interestingly, no swimming), there were so many other wholesome, tear-jerking moments. Watching Australia's Logan Martin win the first ever Olympic Gold for freestyle BMX was pretty cool, mostly because his stunts were so impressive, but the girls skateboarding was incredibly heart-warming.

Three teenage girls (aged 13, 13 and 16) won gold, silver and bronze; two of them from Japan, with the silver medallist from Brazil. Their skills are clearly amazing, and seeing their genuine support and respect for each other was my first 2020 Olympic 'this is the heart of the event' moment. And there were more.

I didn't think it would be possible to be on the edge of my seat during a high jump event, but the men's competition proved me wrong there.

Gianmarco Tamberi from Italy, and Mutaz Barshim from Qatar, shared a gold medal after reaching a tie. Rivals in competition, but friends in life – the excitement from these two when they agreed to share was unreal to watch. It moved so fast that I actually didn't really understand what was happening at first, so I was grateful for the commentary.

And of course, watching WA's own Peter Bol run in the 800m final was a highlight. Often referred to as the 'two-lap sprint', my son knows just how gruelling this event can be. Originally from Sudan, Peter did Australia proud coming fourth in the final after being the first Australian to qualify in more than 50 years.

By the time you read this the games will be well and truly over, with the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games also just coming to a close. Prior to this year's event, I was sceptical that it should be happening at all – it just didn't seem right with so much COVID-19 in the air. But actually, it was like a big global hug, watching athletes come together from all over the world to perform at their peak in sport and friendship.

While the stands were almost empty due to the pandemic, for a little while the Olympics brought those of us around the world with access to watch into a space of awe over what felt like the best that sport can give us.

**Heather Dowling,
Editor**

5 minutes with... Robert Watson



Robert Watson, Past Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, is stepping down from his long-term role as Chair of the UnitingCare WA Forum. He spends 5 minutes with us to share some reflections.

How long did you serve with the UnitingCare WA Forum?

I was fortunate to be involved with the UnitingCare WA Forum, and its predecessor the UnitingCare Commission, since the late 1990's. This also meant that I was the WA Synod's representative as a member of the UnitingCare Australia's National Reference Committee.

What are some of your most memorable moments with the commission and the forum?

During those three decades, how could I not have numerous memorable moments when working with such groups of wonderful, committed people? Perhaps the pivotal moments included:

- Along with Doug Lambert and Rev Michaela Tiller, being part of a Synod appointed Task Group, considering a review of our church's community services and developing an action plan for their future direction.
- Helping, over a period of time, our agencies and the Synod to form a deeper understanding and honouring of the gifts and graces that both parties bring to the relationship.
- When the agencies agreed that I should remain the Chair even though I was the Mission Development Leader at UnitingCare West following on from my Moderatorship.

Who are your role models?

As a follower of Jesus of Nazareth there were quite a number of Christian women and men who inspired me and helped in my formation. These people included four men who had a profound effect on me over the years.

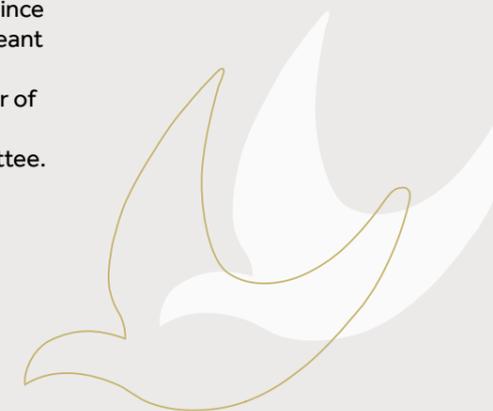
One was a Saint I never met personally; one was my boss; one was a minister who really opened my eyes and helped me fall in love with living out the hope embodied in the Kingdom of God and its Shalom in its fullest intent; and one who was a German-American academic who influenced disability policy and practice through his development of social role valorisation.

Respectively, they were Saint Francis of Assisi; Les Smith, the Director of Methodist Homes for Children; Rev Harry Lucas; and Dr Wolf Wolfensberger whom I was given the opportunity to study under for a brief period of time when he came to Australia.

What are your hopes for the Uniting Church WA as you pass the baton?

I am old enough to be one of those who voted for union. I have no doubt that we are pilgrims on a journey towards that time when we can know that the Kingdom of God, for which we so earnestly pray and work, has come.

Let us remain faithful to our calling and our Statement to the Nation, as the shapes and forms change around us, never forgetting that we will not be forsaken, and that God has not finished with us yet.





Tranby Engagement Hub a WA-first

Jessica Brodie-Hall

Uniting WA is thrilled to have opened the doors to its transformed Tranby Engagement Hub (Tranby), Perth's first co-designed and purpose-built crisis intervention space for people experiencing homelessness.

Minister for Community Services, Simone McGurk, officially launched the newly-renovated Tranby, made possible by a \$1.7m grant from Lotterywest, at an event in June.

"Uniting WA is at the coalface of supporting rough sleepers," said Minister Simone McGurk.

"This is a vital engagement and referral service for people who are in crisis and sleeping rough."

In a WA first, the space was carefully designed in collaboration with people with lived experience of homelessness. As well as increasing the capacity for Tranby to respond to the hundreds of requests for help it receives each week, the new facility was purpose-built

to support an active referral and engagement model.

It all starts with: "How can we help you?"

It's a simple question, but one that marks the beginning of a journey that sees the team at Uniting WA provide ongoing, customised support that empowers people to develop the strength, skills and resilience they need to face their challenges and achieve positive change in their lives.

"The new Tranby can truly meet the needs of the people it supports by facilitating intentional and purposeful engagement with every person who accesses the service," said Amanda Hunt, CEO of Uniting WA.

"Most importantly – it is a place of connection where wraparound supports are tailored to what each individual needs to enable their way out of homelessness."

The new facility offers a full suite of amenities including meals, showers, internet, laundry and medical support, as well as access to trauma, drug and alcohol

counselling services, education and training.

Multi-purpose gathering and meeting spaces of different sizes facilitate greater privacy and safety for separate cohorts of people, and a commercial kitchen will create opportunities for capacity building and hospitality training to support pathways out of homelessness.

Tranby forms part of an integrated community sector response to homelessness, specialising in meeting the needs of a complex cohort of rough sleepers in the Perth CBD. This includes people experiencing long-term or chronic homelessness, many of whom present with significant issues that make it difficult to access other services.

There are more than 900 people sleeping rough in the Perth CBD, and more than 9 000 people experiencing homelessness across WA.

You can help support people on their journey out of homelessness by donating at unitingwa.org.au or by mail to: Fundraising, Uniting WA, GPO Box B74, Perth WA 6838.

15 years of Uniting WA



Kate Henning

In September 2005, the Uniting Church WA decided that 8 of its community services agencies and parish missions would come together to form a new community services agency. UnitingCare West (now Uniting WA) commenced operations on 1 July 2006.

Now, on its 15th birthday, Uniting WA reflects on a history that goes back to the roots of the Uniting Church in WA, and the legacy of those pioneering visionaries.

The merger of Fremantle Wesley Mission, Mofflyn, Rainbow Project, Trinity Outreach Services, UCA Outreach Services, Uniting Community House Midland, UnitingCare Kwinana and Wesley Mission Perth into UnitingCare West provided a strong governance structure and more strength in adapting to the changing community services sector. However, many were worried that the unique and necessary programs provided by the smaller

agencies would be lost in a bigger organisation.

Uniting team member Joanne Goodwin originally worked for Mofflyn, starting in 1996.

"It was a very scary time when the organisation formed. There was lots of change. We went from being a tiny little program at Mofflyn to being part of a big organisation," she said.

All of the organisations that merged to form Uniting WA had begun in response to unmet needs in the community, and most had long histories of working to support vulnerable West Australians.

The 2002 Marketing Plan for Wesley Mission Perth said, "Our programs of support focus on the gospel examples of empowerment. Empowerment is best achieved by identifying and working with people's own natural strengths — working through the difficulties they are experiencing using these strengths to solve their problems."

The Uniting Church also pledged in the 1977 Inaugural Statement

to the Nation 'to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere.'

UnitingCare West was formed with these values at its core. And while it's changed its look to become Uniting WA, it's still the same at heart.

"There's been so much change for the better since the organisation formed," said Joanne, who's still supporting vulnerable families after all these years.

"We can definitely provide a better service for the people we support. We can link them to other services and give them wrap-around support."

It's exciting to be able to mark this next phase of Uniting WA with the recent relaunch of the Tranby Engagement Hub for people experiencing homelessness — still with the goal of bringing services together to support people, but now with an updated, co-designed, purpose-built space.



Mission Plan starts with community connection

Bev Fabb

During its Mission Planning process in 2018 one of the disturbing learnings for Star St Uniting Church in Carlisle was that we were virtually invisible in our local community.

While our building is on a busy intersection, it is not immediately identifiable as a church – many locals thought it was part of a nearby nursing home, or a business or offices. A few years ago an attractive mural to symbolise our church had been created on an outside wall, but it was clear we needed more. Few local residents knew about our church, what we did or what we stood for.

The first thing we did was to commission an international competition for the design of a logo which represented Star St Uniting Church. The winner of the competition was a woman from the Philippines and her design is now prominent on all our communications. It has a cross at the centre, representing Christ who is central to our life, surrounded by a group of rainbow coloured people

– to represent the diversity in our church – with arms raised in praise, reaching out to the community.

The next step was to order new signage for the church to increase our visibility. The new signage was professionally designed and included our Mission Statement – ‘Transforming Lives, Transforming our Community’ – as well as the Star St logo and the Uniting Church logo. The new signage included an electronic sign which displays changing messages about our church, our activities and our values.

In late 2019 we received a Grant from Thrive Mission Committee to create an outdoor hospitality space to enable us to engage more with our community. This includes a garden bench for passers-by to rest, a Little Library for sharing of books and a Prayer Box, where local residents can leave prayer requests. These are shared in worship every Sunday which enables the congregation to get a feel for what are current issues in the community. The Little Library and Prayer Box were made for us by Belmont Men’s Shed, thus developing another relationship within our community.

Finally, we started becoming more visible on social media. There are active Facebook groups for residents of Carlisle, Lathlain, Victoria Park and Belmont and we began publicising activities at Star St on these forums. In particular we advertised the Emergency Food Parcels program that we run weekly with the result that we were inundated with donations of food from local residents, who dropped by to see what we were doing.

One issue we have identified in our local community is the number of people in housing crisis due to increase in rents combined with decrease in Centrelink income. Star St is now co-ordinating local community services in a campaign to get greater State Government funding for public housing.

The first step in developing a Mission Plan is to build relationships with your local community, both listening to local concerns and sharing what your church has to offer. Through all these projects the local community now knows that Star St is here, that we care about people, that we want to contribute to our local community and that they are invited to join us in worship, witness and service.



Rays of sunshine through heritage listed windows

A few months ago, Dr Fiona Bush, a heritage consultant, contacted Cannington Uniting Church as she was interested in two stained glass windows that were installed in our building during its construction in 1963: one depicting the Methodist Youth Fellowship and the other depicting the Rays, which were a Christian group of young girls.

Fiona informed us that the artists who made and installed the windows were Ted Gowers and Albert Brown, who traded as Gowers and Brown. They operated in WA between 1954 and 2003. The technique they used in the manufacturing was using concrete and glass.

Unfortunately, the technique they used was never passed on and went with Ted and Albert to their graves. Other buildings where you can see their work in Perth are the St George’s Anglican Cathedral, and the chapels at Trinity and Aquinas Colleges.

Fiona told us that the two windows in our church were heritage listed. Rays were a Methodist Christian girls fellowship which continued in our church well after the Union of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Methodist Youth Fellowship again kept going after union but changed its name to Cannington Youth Fellowship.

The foundation plaque tells us the church was opened on the 16th of February 1963. Rev FC Sampson was the Minister, and the builder was HL Clarke. Since then, a hall and kitchen has been added. A courtyard between the church and hall has been bricked paved and glass door entrance has also been added. Four other church groups now also use our facilities.

Dr Fiona Bush OAM obtained a BA degree, majoring in archaeology from Sydney University, followed by a Masters’ degree in Building Conservation from the University of NSW. Fiona then headed west with her husband in 1984, where she found that, at that time, the heritage industry was in its infancy.

To learn more about heritage in WA she joined the National Trust’s Built Environment Committee in 1985 and has remained on it ever since – although the name has changed over the years.

Fiona has worked as a building archaeologist and heritage consultant in WA for over 30 years. She has a broad spectrum of heritage interests. She is a member of the Mundaring and Hills Historical Society and a Councillor with the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. She served on the State Heritage Office’s Register Committee from 2005 until its disbandment in 2019. In January 2017 she was awarded an OAM for services to community history and heritage conservation.



Leading with creativity and hope

Rebecca Beisler

When Rev Sharon Hollis was named President-elect of the Uniting Church in Australia, the world was a different place.

It was pre-COVID-19. Before mandatory check-ins, the ubiquitous hand sanitiser, the mask-wearing emoji and we all got used to WFH.

On 17 July, Sharon was installed as President of the Uniting Church in Australia, the third woman to hold the post and the first ordained woman in the role.

However, she will do so in a global context no one might have predicted.

Even beyond COVID-19, there are many changing circumstances in our society and in our church which have left many of us asking, what is the future of the Uniting Church?

Some might say a daunting task lies ahead for Sharon to lead the Church through this pivotal time of self-reflection and change.

But if there is one theme that is constant in Sharon's life, it has been change. She has lived it, led people through it and relishes the kind

of big picture thinking needed to reimagine what might be.

Sharon comes to the role having served in the Uniting Church from a number of interesting perspectives – she was Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania from 2016-19 and has been a ministry educator and congregational leader.

As a young person, her identity was formed within and by the Uniting Church, and those experiences have shaped the hopes she carries for the church going forward.

When she was eight, Sharon's family moved to Keilor Park under the flightpath of Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport. It was a hub of cultures and languages of largely European migrants.

"We lived on a street with over 100 houses and there were only two English-speaking families. There were people from Hungary, Germany, Malta, Italy and Greece."

"It struck me when we moved to the country how I'd really taken that for granted. It wasn't something that was celebrated like we celebrate multiculturalism today, but you would hear different languages coming out of your neighbour's backyards and smell different foods."

"I guess I grew up thinking it's possible to live alongside people who aren't like you."

At 13, she moved to her mother's home town of Finley, a small town in the Riverina region of NSW where she finished her schooling. Moving back to Melbourne to begin an Arts Degree at Monash University opened a new world.

"My horizons expanded beyond anything I'd ever known, both socially and culturally, but particularly intellectually. I did a subject on how women are portrayed in Australian history, and I became a feminist. It gave me a sense that learning can change you and can give you real insight and power."

It was also a formative time for her identity as a Christian.

"It was probably my first exposure to how negatively some people view the Church. I had to work out what it meant to engage in social justice from a faith perspective. When that wasn't the motivating factor for most people, how do you make peace with that in yourself?"

A key mentor for Sharon at the time was Rev Jim Murray, the minister at Monash Uniting Church.

"He helped me understand that if your faith was to have any integrity, it had to be embedded in committed action in the world."

Not long after university, Sharon discerned a call to ministry. She describes her life as an ordained minister as an honour and privilege.

"To be able to preach every week, open up scripture and help people see the way of God in that; to accompany people through major life transitions and to be with people in the darkest of moments; just to be able to encounter people at depth, is really rewarding."

"To be able to preach every week, open up scripture and help people see the way of God in that; to accompany people through major life transitions and to be with people in the darkest of moments; just to be able to encounter people at depth, is really rewarding."

In her first congregational placement, Sharon was called to a congregation that was approaching the end of its life.

Eighteen months into the placement, when all avenues for survival were exhausted, the congregation voted to close and gave themselves 18 months to prepare.

"I have such high regard for that congregation. They didn't fight it. They just said, right, 'Let's work out the best way to do this.'"

Sharon walked alongside the congregation through the process and helped them discern their priorities for transferring to a new congregation. In the end, the congregation unanimously agreed to a new home and they all moved together.

"When we all met a year later, they all looked at me and said, 'Oh, we should have done it earlier. It's been so fantastic. They've been so welcoming.'"

Sharon is still full of admiration for the mature approach of the community.

"They were able to find new life because they ended the old one. It might not have emerged in the same way if they hadn't been willing to say, this congregation's life is ending."

"It was a very hopeful and faithful experience."

Sharon has also found hope in the darkest moments of her own life.

Nearly eight years ago, Sharon lost her beloved partner Michael to suicide. They were married for 19 years. At the time of his death, Sharon says she pulled on all her intellectual knowledge of grief and loss, but that didn't make it easy.

"People say, 'I don't know how you keep going' but you don't get a lot of choice. I had two daughters and I had to get up every day and at least make their lunch and pack them off to school."

"I said to myself, this can either break me or it can break me open and I want to choose to be broken open by it. And I hope it's made me a better, wiser, more compassionate person."

"I still miss him all the time. I'm still deeply grateful for having known him. He had a great capacity to be supportive and encouraging and I still feel the legacy of that all the time."

A key project during Sharon's term as President is to help lead the Assembly's Act2 conversation – a process of discernment about where God is calling the Church into the future.

Sharon says this may mean sitting in the uncomfortable space between endings and new beginnings.

"I think we need those courageous conversations about the way we do things. Is this way of being or structure or project helping us be the community we want to be?"

"That takes a lot of discernment and being willing to listen to each other, and to own our sadness when we need to let go."

For Sharon, the future conversation is also about hope.

"One of the phrases that has stuck with me from the Act2 conversation is the end goal of 'life-giving communities of faith!'"

"Sharon hopes the Act2 project will inspire us to be more creative in thinking about what a community of faith looks like, whether it's online, face-to-face or gathered for a short time, and to rethink the ways the Uniting Church is engaged in the world."

"What life-giving communities of faith do is help people notice and see where God is in the world and equip them to participate in that."

For Sharon, how the Uniting Church engages in the public space unequivocally starts with how we as a church and as a nation come to terms with the dispossession of Australia's First Peoples and the continuing privilege most of us have because of it.

"Our First People have gifted us with the Statement from the Heart, and the generosity in that continues to stagger me. That a people dispossessed by us would come back and say they would like to have another go to set this right."

"I think if we miss that opportunity, it's catastrophic for us as a nation."

"Our own Preamble is a beginning, but we still have a long way to go to live into that and really work out what it means."

At the 16th Assembly online meeting in July, Sharon invited First Nations students from Nungalinga College to lead the Bible Study.

"I'm intrigued and really glad we've got this opportunity to hear those leaders open scripture for us and to hear what they want to say to us about what it means to live together in love and what that demands of us as Second Peoples."

Another way Sharon hopes the 16th Assembly will help the church think differently is the intentional use of different languages to communicate the theme "Dwelling in Love".

"We have to keep reminding ourselves that we are a multilingual church. We all speak many languages and those languages have embedded in them meaning and culture."

"I hope it prompts people to find someone who speaks another language and ask them how they draw out different meaning when they read it."

Sharon is also aware that stepping into the role of President requires switching her own perspective from a Synod lens to a national perspective.

"I have belonged and worked in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania for nearly 30 years. It's a part of my life I've always been involved in. There's a little bit of grief in that part of my life coming to an end, but I am also looking forward to seeing the future of the UCA from all of the unique and diverse perspectives that we have across our church."

Whatever lies ahead, change is certain. Sharon will no doubt lead with creativity, energy, resilience and hope.



Rev Charissa Suli announced as President-elect

Rev Charissa Suli has joyfully been declared President-elect of the Uniting Church in Australia. Charissa is the youngest and first person of colour to serve as President-elect, and the second ordained woman.

In her response to the announcement Charissa said: "This is truly an historic moment for the church. This is ground-breaking that you call a Second Generation Tongan Australian, still in her thirties. Today we move forward because of you all."

"I am conscious of people, both known and unknown, who have prayed, sacrificed and struggled for this moment. But let us celebrate it and give thanks for what God has

done and continues to do through your witness to Christ's radical hospitality."

Rev Sharon Hollis, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, congratulated Charissa and rejoiced in this historic moment for the church.

"You (Charissa) are youngest person ever elected and you are the first person of colour. We rejoice for you in this election, for what it means for you, for your family and for the church."

Charissa is currently National Consultant with the Assembly. She has more than 20 years' experience in cross cultural and intercultural ministry in the Uniting Church. She was ordained in 2014 and served in congregational ministry at Dapto Uniting Church in NSW.

She paid tribute to those who had nurtured, encouraged and empowered her to realise her gifts of leadership and invest in the leadership of the younger generations of the church.

Charissa thanked those who had been part of her journey, those who had prayed and supported her and gave special thanks for her family.

"I will serve the church faithfully, leading it into the love of God, with Jesus Christ as my shepherd, and trusting the Holy Spirit to lead me each day, but for now I continue to grow in my role and learning with the amazing Assembly Resourcing Unit."

Charissa will serve the Uniting Church as President from 2024-2027.

Dr Deidre Palmer has used her retiring President's address at the 16th Assembly meeting to encourage Uniting Church members to remain strong and full of hope, reminding the church of the many signs of God's abundant grace.

Deidre reflected on the ways the church has been changed and challenged during the pandemic, which began in the second year of her presidency. She acknowledged those currently in lockdown, and the loss, grief and isolation people have experienced and continue to experience.

Dr Palmer said the theme for the triennium – Abundant Grace and Liberating Hope – had provided a lens for the many conversations she had shared over the past three years with people from across the church.

In particular she highlighted three ways she had seen signs of Christ's liberating hope, including our covenant relationship walking together as First and Second Peoples, our multicultural and intercultural community in Christ and our participation in God's renewal and healing of the whole creation.

In closing Dr Palmer gave thanks to all those who had supported and upheld her in prayer during her time

as President, giving special thanks to her husband Lawrie, and her family.

"Thank you to the Uniting Church – the beloved community of Christ, to which I'm so blessed to belong."

"I give thanks above all to God, who has equipped and sustained me through this time with hope and joy.

"God is always more than we can imagine – more loving, more inclusive, more creative, more willing to work with our frailties, more able to equip us with gifts and strength than we had thought possible. As the Uniting Church may we continue to be shaped by the abundant grace of God and bear witness to Christ's liberating hope."

Bible reflections from Nungalinya College

First Nations leaders from Nungalinya College led Bible reflections in the opening worship on day 2 of the 16th Assembly.

Nungalinya is an ecumenical training college located in Darwin equipping First Peoples for leadership in churches and communities. It is supported by the Anglican, Uniting and Catholic churches of the Northern Territory.

With support and co-ordination from Rev Michelle Cook, eight leaders from Nungalinya shared on the theme 'Dwelling in love' informed by group Bible studies on the context of 1 Corinthians 13, St Paul's reflections on the sharing of the Lord's Supper and John 15.

In preparing for the study, participants washed each other's feet and thought about the connection between serving and being connected to Jesus.

The study opened with an introduction to the Yolŋu worldview from Rev Deacon Maratja Dhamarrandji, a leader of the Northern Regional Council of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and former chair of the Nungalinya Board.

"A Yolŋu is always a 'half' of another 'set' of Yolŋu. This understanding may be contrasted from the Latin American saying that it takes two to tango; in the Yolŋu worldview, it takes more than one to be Yolŋu," Maratja said.

"In the double parts of my cultural heritage, I am also body soul and spirit. I am connected to the past, and now and the future. I am of those at once, I am never alone."

Joanne Baker, from Milinjimbi, and Maurice Karui, from Wadeye (Port Keats), reflected on what it means to act in love.

"How I show love in the community is to walk with those people who are broken in spirit," said Joanne.

"Love is action, love hurts, love brings people together. It has to be the way Jesus taught us. When we have that integrity of the Lord inside us, your love shows clear."

The last reflection, 'Speaking in love', by Yurranydjil Dhurrkay, was recorded for the UCA Queensland Synod Bible study on Ephesians 4:15-16. She reflected on how we build one another up as the Body of Christ.

"That way I am able to work with you, and build you, as a part of Christ's body. I'm helping you to find your place in Christ's body, and you and me will both grow in love. And then we will become strong and know that Christ is the head."

Watch the Bible study reflection at vimeo.com/unitingchurch. A study guide for the reflections is available at uniting.church/bible-reflections-from-nungalinya-college



Building a culture of safety



Heather Dowling

Since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Uniting Church WA has responded to more than 100 claims of historical child sexual abuse within our former institutions, and colleges. For some this might be a hard thing to comprehend, but it is important to acknowledge if the church is to live out its faith of caring for the vulnerable and working towards justice.

This September marks National Child Protection Week, Sunday 5 to Saturday 11.

The Uniting Church WA acknowledges its failings to the community in terms of keeping children safe and, guided by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, is working towards a future where all vulnerable people are safe. In WA, this work is the responsibility of the Culture of Safety Team which resurces the church by developing current Safe Church policies, training and resources, and responding to survivors of abuse.

While the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse gave its final report, with recommendations, in 2017, the Uniting Church WA has been working in the Safe Church space since Rev John Atkinson was resourcing the Called to Care program back in the 1990s. The current program has continued to build on these important principals.

“Our aim is to make amends for past abuse and to prevent further harm now and into the future,” said Cindy

Gorton, Executive Officer: Culture of Safety at the Uniting Church WA.

“To do this we are now responsible for professional and ethical standards training for our ministers and lay leaders; and we are participating in the National Redress Scheme which offers survivors of past abuse a redress payment, counselling and a direct personal apology for each one who requests it.”

“We are looking at safeguarding and protecting all vulnerable people in the church,” Cindy said.

The Uniting Church’s National Safe Church Unit was established as a response to the Royal Commission, and from a need for consistency across the Uniting Church in Australia. John Cox, Director of the Uniting Church in Australia’s National Safe Church Unit, said being a safe church is the responsibility of all Uniting Church members.

“One of the things we determined as a church was to say, if we’re going to be a safe church, if we are going to commit to this development,

then we’ve got to do it consistently across the whole of the church,” he said.

“The National Safe Church unit sits between the Assembly and the Synods, and our responsibility is to do this work on behalf of the church.”

“We have responsibility to develop national policy, to develop national education and training programs which people use consistently, and to develop cultural messages about how we are a safe church and what that looks and feels like.

“Our responsibility is to both look at the very particular recommendations of the Royal Commission and implement those, but beyond that, to identify, articulate and lead those elements of what it means to be a child-safe organisation.”

While safety has been a concern for the church for decades, the Royal Commission has taught the Uniting Church a number of hard lessons. One of these being that we simply cannot trust people purely because they are part of the church. Screening and other measures

must be enacted when people are working with children and young people.

“There are many, many [lesson’s learnt],” John said.

He said that the church has learnt that the long-held belief of ‘it can’t happen here’, is false.

“It absolutely can happen here, and we are in some ways more prone to attacks because of the level of trust that exists in a congregational church setting.

“We’ve become more sharply aware of grooming and what’s required of us to interrupt grooming behaviours.

“We’ve become more sharply aware of the extent to which trauma impacts lives lifelong. And that we need to roll out a greater level of understanding of what it means to engage each other in trauma informed ways so that we’re not retraumatizing people in the way that we engage with each other.

“We’ve learnt about corporate responsibility. Child safety is not just the responsibility of people who lead children’s groups, or ministers, church councils or people who run programs. Child safety is everyone’s responsibility – and children are safer when we take responsibility together.

“We learnt that there should be no roles in the church that are exempt from the checks and balances applied to everyone.

“We learnt that the lack of consistency across organisations was a significant risk factor, as gaps in processes facilitated access by people who might seek to harm children.

“And, whilst this isn’t a learning from the Commission, one of the learnings that we’re having as we continue, is that if we’re working

to be safe church for children and young people then what we’re actually doing is working towards being a safe church for all people.

“Foundationally, if we take hold of that cultural imperative that its everyone’s responsibility, if we wash away some of those long-held beliefs that it couldn’t happen here, if we work consistently to ensure a commitment to train our people and build awareness and quality processes around reporting abuse, then those things actually translate beyond just keeping young people safe. We’re creating structures where all of us are safe because of the culture that we’re building.”

During the Royal Commission, the Uniting Church committed to working with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

“The Uniting Church’s commitment was to provide everything to the Royal Commission that the Royal Commission wanted from the

church; to learn everything we could from the Royal Commission and then do everything in our power to implement the recommendations," said John.

"One of the things the church determined out of the Royal Commission was, being a safe church isn't just about policy or process. It's about understanding who we are and how we all are part of being a safe church.

"It's a corporate responsibility, not a set of individual responsibilities."

Responding to the Final Report from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Uniting Church in Australia released a statement calling on members to do their part to make the church, agencies and schools the safest they can be for children and all people in its care.

And in a Pastoral Statement issued to coincide with the end of the Royal Commission, Stuart McMillan, then President of the Uniting Church in Australia said the church would reflect on recommendations and implement measures to deliver the best quality of care, service and support for children.

"I would again like to sincerely apologise to all children in our care who suffered sexual abuse in our church, whether it happened after our foundation in 1977 or before that, in our predecessor churches," he wrote.

"We are, and I am, deeply sorry that we did not protect and care in accordance with our Christian values for those children. I again want to acknowledge the impact that it's had in the lives of those young people and their families, and to say that I am truly sorry.

"We must never forget the courage of survivors who've come forward to tell their stories in public and in private. The Uniting Church will continue to work constructively with Government and other stakeholders for a truly national redress scheme, as the most equitable way to support survivors wherever they might be.

"Our Church's commitment is that we will seek to make amends and to strive to ensure others will not suffer as they have. Our prayers and a determined focus will be required if we are to build a robust culture of child safety."

The Uniting Church in Australia has since made further statements reiterating this response.

In response to the Royal Commission, the Uniting Church WA has made a number of measures to prevent abuse within the organisation. Volunteers

and staff are screened prior to commencing their roles, but there are also practices put in place in an ongoing basis, such as making sure that there are two or more people in a room with children, and that workers are educated on grooming processes and inappropriate behaviours – and what to do and who to report to if they witness these behaviours.

Members of the organisation are also encouraged to participate in Safe Church Training, which is an ecumenical program developed specifically for churches by the National Council of Churches Australia, and delivered by the Uniting Church WA Culture of Safety team. This training is compulsory for Uniting Church WA Ministers and Lay Leaders, but open to all members of the church.

Cindy said the training incorporates Biblical principles, exploring passages which encourage us to protect marginalised and disadvantaged people in our society – asking 'what does God expect of us?' and 'how would Jesus respond?'

The training also looks at power balances, the difference between crossing vs violating boundaries, duty of care identifying abuse, and how to report and handle disclosures and misconduct.

One practical suggestion from the training is for churches to have a policy that new members of the congregation don't take on leadership roles for a set period of time – possibly six to twelve months. This gives people an opportunity to get to know the person and their motives, and time to work through proper screening processes.

"It is so important to adequately screen our workers and leaders. Some of the lessons from the Royal Commission is that leaders were sometimes not suitable and/or were intentionally causing harm. So having these processes in place allows us to screen out potentially risky leaders, and that's emphasised throughout the training," said Cindy.

"Over time, a few churches have had new people approach them to work in particular areas, like children's ministry, and have immediately



put in practice the minimum six to twelve months attendance policy, while undertaking the screening. In some incidences, it was found that a person wasn't suitable to work in the area that they had asked to work in," Cindy said.

"To have some of those things in place, it's effective – it works.

"If it's the same policy for everyone that comes into the church, it takes the pressure off. And a new person coming into the church really needs to know what that church is about before they can be expected to take on a role, so it protects both sides really."

"And we talk about people being aware and actually saying things if they notice any behaviour that's not appropriate within their church – people being aware of about what they can do to disrupt it or call it out."

"As you can see the Safe Church Training covers many key principles including the foundations underpinning a safe church; understanding and responding to the various types of abuse in adults and children, identifying grooming behaviours and other indicators of abuse; how to ensure safe leaders and knowing how to keep our environment physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all people. It's broad and very practical," said Cindy.

"We also have a lot of helpful resources to assist congregations in implementing the WA Safe Church Policy and the National Child Safe Policy Framework.

"Congregations can access all of these resources by contacting the Culture of Safety team and discussing what you require.

Cindy said it's also important for churches to have a clear, visible message in their church – using posters on the walls or flyers available – letting newcomers know the policies and processes around being a safe church. Not only does it keep people informed and reminded about the work, but it shows new visitors or members to the church that they are not a soft target for abuse.

"If there's public statements or posters about a commitment to being a safe church and child safety visible, with information and photos of safe church contact people, then if anyone comes in with the idea that we're a soft and easy target, they will get a clear message that this place it to risky for any inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

Being a safe church is more than any one action or policy though – as the name of Cindy's team suggests – it's about a culture of safety.

"It's several layers or levels of safe church actions and practices," Cindy said. "And it starts with a commitment to do all that is required to be a safe church for all people."

To get involved with Safe Church Training, or find out more about the work of the Uniting Church WA Culture of Safety Team, get in touch with Cindy Gorton at the Uniting Church Centre on 9260 9800 or email cindy.gorton@wa.uca.org.au

Learn more and access resources at:

unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church

unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church

unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church

unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/safe-church

Read the Final Report from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse at childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au





A church without a passenger seat

In May this year, Dr Deidre Palmer, who at the time was the President of the Uniting Church in Australia, invited young adults of the Uniting Church WA to join her for a conversation. This would be one of eight entries into her project, 'Around the Table', which aimed to collate and represent the direct experiences of young people across the Uniting Church in Australia.

Deidre partnered with Amos Washington, 2018 Australian UN Youth Representative, to create an intentional agenda with questions that spanned young Uniting Church members' joys, griefs, and concerns, their journey with Christ, and their Christian discipleship.

As we worked through these questions, I was struck by how almost everyone spoke of their value for our church's diversity. We spoke with pride about the church's work towards a broader Union, and the mutual recognition, understanding and participation of all those within it.

Several spoke of the work we had ahead of us to ensure the safety of everyone within that Union.

And the need for the church to take a broader understanding of health – mental, physical and communal – within its membership and surrounding community.

Across the group, many spoke of their appreciation for the church's prophetic voice on issues like the climate crisis. The fossil fuel industry has five times as much carbon in its reserves as even the most conservative climate scientists say is safe to burn. Our generation must defuse that carbon bomb, just as we must stand with First Nations leaders seeking justice and self-determination, end our countries' extrajudicial concentration camps for those fleeing war and collapse, and transform the margins of our society so that every person has the means for a life beyond precarity and despair.

Many attributed the church's commitments on these issues as being the thing that connected them most with the Uniting Church community.

Then there were questions about the reproduction of the church. How will our Uniting Church community relate these prophetic calls to their inspiration in Christ? How do we maintain the biblical vocabulary, theological

convictions, and spiritual nourishment required to continue our important work?

How do we respond to the growing disenchantment of this world? What alternative will we proclaim to the idols of wealth, infinite growth, and the military industrial complex? How can our generation speak more of that divine alternative – a table where all are welcome, their debts forgiven, and lives renewed in God's love?

I'm sure these ideas aren't new to members of the Uniting Church, even if you don't consider yourself a 'young person'. Our tradition is shaped by simultaneous calls to seek justice and to spread the Good News. But this project was more than a field trip to collate some young people's ideas. As the night unfolded, many of us would share what (I think) Dr Deidre Palmer would refer to as an 'encounter'.

It's hard to write about this without sounding hifalutin, so instead I hope to re-trace the experience with the hope that it conveys some of it. Below are some of the questions we discussed. As you read them, feel free to consider how you would respond to them today:

- What brings me joy and grief? What sustains and encourages me? What are my concerns for our world?
- How would I describe my faith journey? Where do I see God most at work in the world?
- How do I want the Uniting Church to be in the public space? What are my hopes for the world?

I like to think of myself as a pretty philosophical person, but when it came time to share, I was surprised about what I had to say. Because honestly, when was the last time you were asked questions like these? Not rhetorically, but surrounded by someone anticipating some sort of answer?

Maybe that's some of what it means to have an 'encounter'; to be pulled in by a moment, surprised at what you have to contribute; to be made visible by those listening to you, revealing bits of yourself that you didn't know were there.

This was the core of my experience of Deidre's presidential ministry. The strange feeling of being asked by a lifelong leader of the church what I imagined of its future – and in answering, finding myself participating within that future. Having glimpses of a faith community where no one was relegated to the passenger seat. An invitation to a table where we'd be heard as not just the future of the church, but the church itself.

I know that I will carry that vision with me for a long, long time. And I pray that we might continue to make good on it together.

Mark Brisbane is a member of Social Justice Church, Chair of the Social Justice Commission and a youthful member of the 16th Assembly of the Uniting Church WA.

Dr Deidre Palmer has also made available a full report of the roundtable conversations with young adults and all their feedback. Find out more at uniting.church/retiring-presidents-address

Celebrating 35 years of divinity

A Celebration Service for the Perth College of Divinity will be held on Sunday 19 September, 2.30pm, at the Murdoch University Worship Centre. The service will give thanks for the 35-year partnership, and mark the closure of Murdoch University's theology program.

The Presbytery of WA resolved to withdraw the Perth Theological Hall from the Perth College of Divinity back in 2017. Prior to this, the Perth College of Divinity was a joint Anglican/Uniting Church in Australia body, which oversaw the theological program at Murdoch University. Originally, the college also included the Roman Catholic and Baptist churches.

The Perth College of Divinity has been active since 1985. Since this time, many students have spent their ministry formation at the college.

Rev Dr Anne Wright, Director of Education and Formation for the Uniting Church WA, and Principal of the Perth Theological Hall, said the developments will bring mixed emotions for many.

"I am excited to be part of such an august event as this one, bringing together so many who trained at Perth College of Divinity and with Perth Theological Hall over those 35 years," Anne said. "It will be a special occasion, both nostalgic for the changes which have occurred, some sadness that we have had to deeply renovate Perth Theological Hall to make way for new things in education for the Uniting Church WA, and joy in being together again with friends both past and present."

"John Dunnill and I would like it to be a celebration, of all that has been achieved. A celebration of the many who have passed through its halls and



Staff and students of the Perth Theological Hall, back in the early 1990s.

taught there, and a recognition that we have moved into a new era.

"We celebrate that theological education continues on in different forms, working on new ways of being church in mission to the world, participating together in the Missio Dei (Mission of God)."

Rev Dr Sue Boorer will preach at the service. For more information email cedal@wa.uca.org.au.

Earth, Sea and Sky: Sustainable September 2021

Mikaela Turner

Each year, the Social Justice Commission of the Uniting Church WA resources the church for Sustainable September by preparing and distributing worship material for congregations within the WA Synod.

This year, the theme is 'Earth, Sea and Sky', which focuses on nourishing and caring for our natural resources. The worship materials, including a full liturgy outline, sermon reflections and PowerPoint slides, cover the four Sundays in September.

Each Sunday concentrates on a different aspect of the theme – soil, waters, skies and humankind's relationship with the Earth.

Wendy Hendry, Uniting Church WA Social Justice Officer, says "we are encouraged to know that congregations set aside the month of

September to reflect, pray and take action on issues of sustainability and our Christian call to care for creation."

"The statement made at Assembly back in 2006 is as relevant in 2021 as it was back then, and continues to underpin the work we do, including our focus on Sustainable September."

The statement, *For the Sake of the Planet and All its People*, said "we renew our commitment to move towards sustainable non-exploitative living, believing that God's creation—the earth itself and all the life that it supports—is precious and the Earth's resources exist for the good of all now as well as future generations."

Wendy says "we're thankful for the work Rev Gordon Scantlebury has done in creating so much of the resource material, which are designed to be a user-friendly package for churches with or without a minister in placement.

"Worship leaders can use the material as is or adapt according to their congregation style. We encourage you to get creative with it, connect with relevant examples of sustainability and environmental issues in your community, and facilitate discussion within your congregation."

Sustainable September 2021 worship resources are available to download at ecochurcheswa.net/worship-resources. For more information, contact the Social Justice Unit at social.justice@wa.uca.org.au

Reconnect with the Covenant

The Uniting Church WA, through the Social Justice Commission, has released a Covenanting resource for Uniting Church WA congregations.

A Guide to Congregations in Walking Together as First and Second Peoples encourages and supports councils of the church to re-commit to the Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), to engage and deepen covenantal relationships, and to inspire the church to take action for creating change.

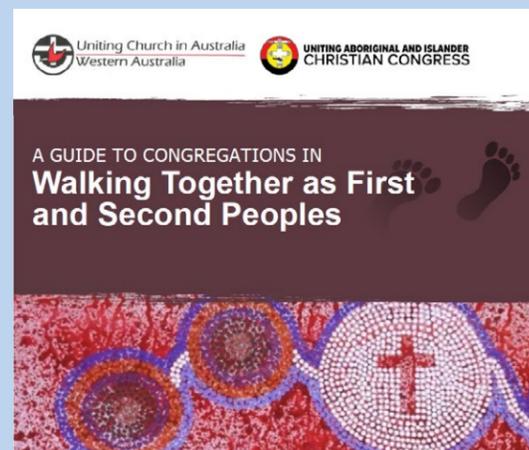
The Uniting Church in Australia accepted an invitation to the Covenant from the UAICC in 1994. The Covenant is an ongoing deep relationship between the Uniting Church and the UAICC, so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

The new resource provides information on cultural awareness, decolonising and developing relationships, as well as ideas for practical covenanting and a guide for developing a covenanting action plan.

"The Covenanting Commission is pleased to be able to offer a Covenanting Guide for use in congregations," said Wendy Hendry, Social Justice Officer for the Uniting Church WA.

"The resource has been developed to provide a simple list of suggested actions congregations can take to progress their Covenanting journey and we encourage all congregations to download the guide and continue to take steps in walking together as First and Second Peoples."

In the words of the WA Regional Committee of the UAICC, "We pray that through your use of this Covenanting Guide you may deepen your understanding of Aboriginal people and culture, and



your understanding of the God who sustained our people through this land over countless generations."

The resource will be launched at the 45th Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA, Friday 10 to Sunday 12 September, at Scotch College. Download your copy on the Uniting Church WA website at unitingchurchwa.org.au/uniting-church-centre/social-justice/first-peoples

Synod meeting 2021

Mikaela Turner

Members of the Uniting Church WA will come together for the 45th Annual Meeting of the Synod at Scotch College from Saturday 11 to Sunday 12 September.

An opening worship, which is open to all, will be held at 7.00pm on Friday 10 September in the Scotch College Chapel.

At the Annual Meeting, lay and ordained members appointed by reporting bodies meet over two days to worship together, share experiences, receive reports and make decisions about the direction of the church.

In the Uniting Church, every effort is made to reach decision by consensus, that members come to a common mind about the wisest way forward. This is done using voting cards – orange indicates warmth to the proposal, blue indicates coolness and yellow indicates a question or request for more information.

Susy Thomas, Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, chose the theme 'Trust in God' for the meeting, which is based on Romans 15:13 NIV: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit".

It is anticipated that at this Annual Meeting the Synod Standing Committee will bring forward a name of someone who they have determined to be suitable to take on the role of General Secretary. The Synod will then decide whether to appoint this person into the role.

Members of the Synod Standing Committee are elected at each Annual Meeting. In between Annual Meetings the Standing Committee act on behalf of the Synod and deal with specific issues that come out of the Synod Meeting.

All reports, proposals and other information on the meeting is available at unitingchurchwa.org.au.



How do you further equip yourself to serve as a leader in your congregation?

Sarah Louise, from Northway Uniting Church, joined in the Practical Pastoral Care workshop at the start of the year.

"It was just what I needed at that time," she said. "It fits with my own personal goals, mission, and busy schedule. The short-term commitment and experience made the learning attainable because it was achievable within my time commitment."

We know that many of us are time-poor, so the Commission for Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) is shaping your continuing education as lay leaders, pastors, and elders to make it as accessible as possible for everyone.

In place of weekly classes, each term we will hold two to three workshops on a theme, and anyone can join for one or all of the

workshops. For those who wish to complete an accredited Certificate IV or Diploma, these workshops will form the in-class component of learning.

Further learning materials are made available to the participants of each workshop via the Uniting Learning site so you can deepen your knowledge on the topic, when you are ready. Alternatively, materials can be sent to on email or posted out to you.

In term four, workshops will be held on preaching and worship. The first workshop, Ordered Liberty, will explore what makes up a Uniting Church worship service, creative approaches to liturgy, as well as tools to inform your preparation.

The second, Approaching the Gospel, will focus on the presentation skills, such as the use of voice, posture, and space.



These workshops will be held on Saturday 16 October and Saturday 4 December.

If you would like further information or to register for one or both of these workshops, please contact the Commission for Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) at PA.education@wa.uca.org.au.

News

Get involved in the Permanency Campaign

Mark Brisbane



Living in a time of video calls and social distancing, it's easy to feel unsure about what the future holds. Earlier this year many speculated about life on the other side of COVID-19. Eight months on, that future remains uncertain.

But for some members of our community, this precariousness has lasted much longer. For many refugees, a chance at a new life

in Australia can mean living in uncertainty for eight or more years without knowing if they'll be allowed to make their home here, or forced to return to the violence they sought safety from.

Under these arrangements, Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs), refugees often aren't able to see their family, apply for the same jobs as other Australians, or plan for their future.

With a federal election on the horizon, a group of Uniting Church WA members are working with refugee leaders, as well as a non-partisan coalition of organisations like CARAD, Red Cross, ASSETS, and the Curtin University Centre for Human Rights Education to ensure that our 'new normal' is one where our refugee neighbours can live reunited with their families, without fear for what the future might hold.

The group is actively seeking volunteers interested in doing tasks such as administration and social media support, handing out flyers, co-ordinating community stalls, and making phone calls.

We are aiming to help connect with people in places where the majority of people seeking asylum live, especially focusing on marginal electorates with incumbents across the political spectrum, where they're likely to have the most impact. And to use this political moment to raise awareness about an apolitical issue, reuniting families, ensuring permanency, so that refugees and people seeking asylum can have a future beyond uncertainty too.

To get involved visit thepermanencycampaign.com



Uniting Aid is a caring agency of the Uniting Church, supporting those receiving Centrelink payments in the City of Stirling. It started its life 40 years ago out of Dianella Uniting Church, offering donated food from the church vestry.

Uniting Aid now operates out of church premises in Nollamara and helps families, single people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those with disabilities, the culturally and linguistically diverse, those experiencing homelessness, and the elderly. The agency supports people with food every three months and with utility bills once every twelve months. They also have an op shop which sells good quality second-hand items and can refer people to other agencies for further support if needed.

For Anti Poverty Week, Sunday 17 to Saturday 23 October, Uniting Aid have shared this cosy Chicken Casserole recipe, great for those feeding a family on a limited budget.

Uniting Aid relies on donations and volunteers to provide their important work. For more information on how you can get involved, visit unitingchurchwa.org.au/unitingaid

Uniting Aid will be celebrating 40 years of support to the community with a Thanksgiving Service on Sunday 26 September, 9.30am, at Nedlands Uniting Church.

Chicken Casserole

Ingredients

- ½ a kilo of chicken drumsticks
- 1 can of condensed mushroom or chicken soup
- 1 small can of corn
- Any vegetables on hand

Method

Brown the chicken drumsticks in a frying pan before placing them in a casserole dish with the can of soup.

Add the drained can of corn, plus any other vegetables you have available.

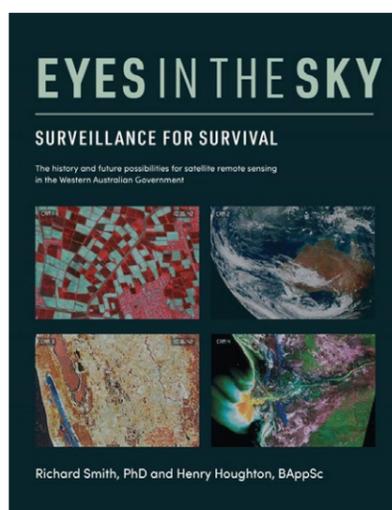
Bake in a moderate oven (180 degrees C) for about 45 minutes.

Serve with rice or potatoes.

We want to share your recipe!
If you have a recipe you'd like to share, send it in to revive@wa.uca.org.au.

Eyes in the Sky: Surveillance for Survival

By Henry Houghton and Richard Smith,
Green Hill Publishing, 2021



They tell of the early days and development of the science and technology, which is in itself fascinating to science professionals and laypersons alike. 'Make do' solutions and interaction between world agencies to make this new 1960's technology accessible to the public led to expertise in interpreting sometimes obscure data for the benefit of planners, agriculturists, mineral exploration and the general public, spinning off the back of early weather surveillance satellites. This history is recounted in a way to interest both the professional and general reader.

Perhaps the most compelling narrative running through the book is the way economic considerations override the invaluable, but maybe not as easy to quantify in return for dollar, long term ecological implications of the Earth observations from space.

This led to the Leeuwin Centre for Earth Sensing Technologies and other scientifically valuable consortia being closed even with very successful contribution to the science, after relatively short existence (less than 25 years for Leeuwin Centre), and the government of the day having no compunction in deconstructing the satellite imaging centre attached to Department of Land Information. This is astounding given that 92% of Western Australia is Crown Land for

which successive governments have management and sustainability responsibility.

The book describes the advances in data interpretation and the increasing value of this technology and the importance it has toward our responsibilities as guardians of our planet. Colour and black and white images together with graphs and tables help tell this story. Pioneers in sustainability science are quoted giving support to the importance of the dissemination of satellite data to a wide and diverse audience.

Following brief overviews of the task of writing and publishing the book from both Richard and Henry, Professor Peter Newman launched the book in July at All Saints Floreat Uniting Church, with observations on the value satellite imaging lent to town planning and the lived environment, together with obvious benefits to our society overall.

It was refreshing to see the interest of both a church and secular audience welcoming the work of Richard, a Uniting Church Lay Preacher and his long-time colleague Henry Houghton in this interesting and vital field.

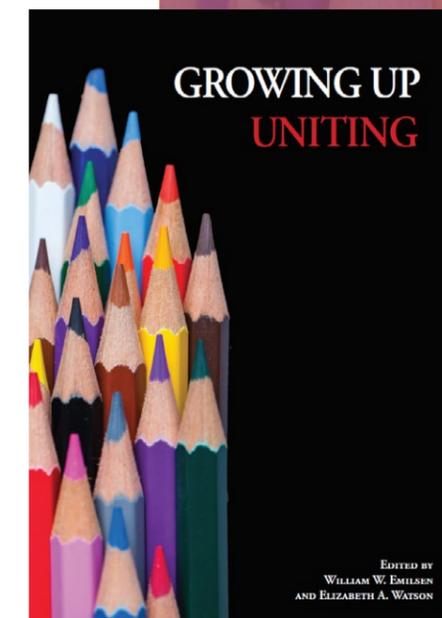
Eyes in the Sky: Surveillance for Survival is available at All Saints Floreat Uniting Church for \$30 pick-up, or can be mailed to you plus the cost of postage. Call 9387 6371.

Geoff Schupp

Henry Houghton, past Director of Mapping and Surveys and Surveyor General of Western Australia, and Richard Smith, Earth Systems Scientist, co-authored this copiously illustrated history of satellite imaging and interpretation particularly focussed on Western Australia.

Growing Up Uniting

Edited by William W Emilsen and
Elizabeth A Watson,
MediaCom Education Inc, 2021



Dorothy Carey

If you were asked, 'What are the distinctive characteristics of the Uniting Church?' How would you respond?

Twenty young people aged from late teens to mid-40s from around Australia were invited to talk about their experiences growing up in the Uniting Church. These are their stories.

They represent the first two generations who were born into and grew up in the Uniting Church. As a guide, they were provided with some non-obligatory suggestions relating to their experience of church, such as the distinctive characteristics of the Uniting Church, its future, factors that have kept them in the Uniting Church and those that would tempt them to walk away from it.

The writers incorporated these in quite different ways. Their stories are a joy to read.

Their experiences have been varied, positive and negative, but throughout their stories are many common markers. Multiculturalism in the Uniting

Church, its covenanting with First Nations people and the courage of the church to speak out publicly on contemporary social and political issues were acknowledged.

Detailed comments on mentoring of young people stands out as most important but declining levels of commitment and support for young people's ministry is seen as a concern.

Women in leadership was identified as especially important in role modelling for young girls giving them freedom to see themselves in leadership roles.

Some questioned if we have failed to live up to the original ecumenical vision of the Basis of Union. Is there a tendency to replace conciliar and consensus models of decision-making with secular corporate and managerial ones? Do we still have preferences for the certainties of the old ways rather than risk the new?

As with most mainline churches in Australia, the Uniting Church has seen a decline in numbers over the past 40 years but the overwhelming and not uncritical conviction from these writers is that God still has a

future for the Uniting Church. One wrote, "I believe the best years of the Uniting Church are in front of us, not behind."

This collection of lively and insightful essays is illuminating reading for anyone who cares about the present and future of the Uniting Church in Australia. They challenge readers to reflect on their own experiences and prioritise what they see as the distinctive characteristics of the Uniting Church. These essays would also make for informative discussion in Church Councils and groups.

We should be thankful for and very proud of the writers of these essays for their preparedness to reflect openly about their experiences. You will honour them by reading their stories.

Ways of knowing: how the God story spoke to a scientist

Karen Sloan

The youngsters I teach human biology to at the University of WA, who are around 17, generally think the only way of knowing is through science – ‘Give me the facts and I will understand the world’.

I love science, but there is another way of knowing, what Rob Bell called mythos, about what lies beneath the facts, that lies in our experiences and our awareness at a very deep level, sometimes beyond the everyday. We would say this is where God is to be found.

We would also say that we can sense this divine presence in philosophy, art, music, nature, literature and in our scriptures – and also in our own ordinary lives, with all its joys and sorrows, if we are listening. The footprint of God if you like.

My journey has involved being fairly anti-religion at one point. When I studied anatomy, then taught it, I was involved in preparing specimens for teaching, so had to dissect dead bodies or cadavers. My thinking started to change a lot, and I started to expand my views of what a human life really was.

When you see a whole cadaver or dead body in a lab, it can be quite confronting. I remember how I was especially touched by an older woman's body, just lying there on the table in one of my sessions. I pondered, was she someone who had a family who loved her, maybe had children, probably like us had her likes and dislikes, maybe she did something really incredible for a job, or maybe she was a cleaner, or stayed home and looked after her kids.

Was she someone who spoke up for others, or believed in God? How did she die, was it quite quick, or a long, drawn-out illness? And why did she feel that donating her body to the anatomy department was a good idea?

What is it to be alive, to be in the world? I know that the inner spark, the life force that makes us who we are was gone from this person. Whatever made that woman alive, had been snuffed out. Whatever made her ‘her’ was gone.

So yes, we are blood and tissue, joints and muscles, organs and skin, but we are also thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, joys and sorrows – a subjective life that seems to stem not just from the physical world but from some culmination of all that we are. That which gives our life meaning and purpose, colour and framework.

My anatomical career, both as a student and as a teacher, led me to explore the nature of life and the age-old question of God – or at least the idea there was something else going on there that couldn't be seen or measured. To examine the “fullness of human experience,” as Paul Kahini writes.

But what did I do with it in my 20s, when this widening of my reality happened? After a while, I fell upon Wembley Downs Uniting Church, not by accident but because I worked at Royal Perth Hospital with a physicist who went there. It was an open, active, exploring community, who was also warm and accepting, so I stayed... and stayed!

Modern physics, focussing on quantum mechanics and cosmology, philosophy and evolutionary biology is taking us to a different more expanded place. We are finding that we are a marvel of creation and there are mysteries going on that are deeper than we can understand.

As science moves beyond materialism, where only things that can be measured are valued, Rupert Sheldrake would suggest we are recovering a sense of the life inherent in nature as a whole and in self organising systems at all levels of complexity. And producing new ways of connecting to our Christian roots and to the God factor.

So maybe the sense of awe we feel at the created order, or the beautiful music we listen to, the sense of peace we experience at times when we are silent, the sense of connectedness to all things that rises up and greets us when we are working alongside others, loving others, the knowing we get at odd times, that there is something more, something extra within and

between us, doesn't seem so radical anymore.

This is the hint of God's presence, surprising us in our ordinary everyday lives. For we sometimes forget this reality when the world goes crazy, that God is in all things, and all things are in God. A presence Jesus calls us to embrace.

But sometimes it's easier said than done. I don't want to leave you thinking I don't have doubts, or that sometimes the divine presence seems a long way away. I can slip back into science/measurement

mode and forget about the mystery. Yet it's okay to search, to explore, to question. As Frederick Buechner says, “that means you are human.”

Or as Kari Jo Verhulst suggests, “This is what it is to be alive!”

It's the greatest of privileges to explore the meaning of God and we come from a long line of searchers. Science helps us to widen our view and open our eyes to the incredible life around us, including the universal God presence we believe in and respond to.

I think so anyway.

Drowning in a sea of plastic

Gordon Scantlebury

I travelled with my wife, Carol along the south coast of WA, and our souls were lifted up by the views of white pristine sands, vivid blue ocean and even a breaching whale. To be enfolded in nature, to still have places of wilderness is so affirming to me as a child of God.

But as we walked the beach we also saw the plastic: bottles and bits of nylon rope, bags and bottle caps and polystyrene, and small plastic fragments – blue, red, green, white. I could have wept.

I was saddened that we in our humanity could spoil such a beautiful, isolated place. I mourned the fish, sea birds and seals being choked to death by our waste. And I said a silent “sorry” to God that we who are supposed to shine with the image of God could be so thoughtless, uncaring and destructive.

In less than ten minutes we gathered up some armfuls of rubbish and put it in the car boot. It was only a small effort in the face of a vast problem, but we hoped it would make a difference to at least some creatures, somewhere.

In 2018, the Synod of the Uniting Church WA resolved to both phase out using non-essential single use plastics in our own life, and to lobby government and industry to phase out such use in our wider community.

How is that going in the place where you live? How is that going in your church, school or agency?

In 2019, the Uniting Church WA Social Justice Commission made a submission to the State Government consultation on single use plastics. Later that year, we applauded the Western Australian Government’s decision to support a refund scheme for used cans and plastic drink containers as well as the earlier decision to phase out the use of plastic shopping bags.

Things can and do move forward, but what is the part you are playing? What are the initiatives you or your church have made to phase out using single use plastics where you live?

We can all make a difference, even with simple actions.

Here are a few ideas:

- Set up a big box in the church foyer where people can bring their used cans and plastic drink containers. Use the funds from these to raise money for a special project, missional outreach, Good Samaritan Enterprises... whatever.
- Stop using single use plastic plates, cups, cutlery, plastic straws etc at your church or school. There’ll be a bit more washing up, but you’ll be helping the planet.
- Find alternatives to plastic wraps by using things like bee’s wax covers, multi-use silicone sheets, multi-use resealable containers, or wrapping foods in waxed paper (that last one was all the go when I was a kid!).
- Organise rubbish clean-ups in your area – along kerb sides, railway reserves, parks or local bush lands – wherever rubbish accumulates. Promote it and make it a wider missional action that includes people from outside the church. People will see that the church cares not just for the environment, but for them as well.
- Invite people to a plastic-free bring and share lunch or picnic. Again, make it a wider community gathering to help promote the Gospel as one that cares for the world.



- TEAR Australia’s ‘Rubbish campaign Kit’ is a great resource, available from www.tearfund.org.au/rubbish/rubbish-campaign-kit or the Social Justice team at the Uniting Church Centre. Email geoffrey.bice@wa.uca.org.au to get a copy.

I know we in Australia are only a part of the global plastics pollution, yet we can still play our part in turning around the rubbishing of our planet. And we as the church can carry hope and be a witness to our own communities that this world and its creatures are truly loved by God. Plastic is fantastic, but let’s use it wisely and show our love.



A pile of plastic Rev Gordon Scantlebury collected along the beach, on WA’s south coast.

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