

# ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



MISSING THE  
GOSPEL  
TARGET?

## Hit or Miss

PAGE 8

PNEUMA lives  
in the West  
BRIAN HILL • 13

Meet our youngest  
member  
IAN CLARKSON • 14

The path to  
Integral Mission  
MARGARET MACMILLAN • 16



PNEUMA lives in the West  
 BRIAN HILL \* 14  
 Meet our youngest member  
 IAN CLARSON \* 14  
 The path to Integral Mission  
 MARGARET MOORE \* 14

Cover illustration mstay/istockphoto.com

## EDITORIAL

# An important debate

In this edition we answer the question “But What is the Gospel?” raised by Niall Reid, Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod of the Uniting Church in response to Brian Medway’s “Primary Purpose” series in *ACCatalyst*.

Gordon Dicker and Ian Weeks give robust responses from an evangelical point of view, pointing out what St Paul said was of “first importance”.

But we also give Moderator Niall Reid space to expand his answer, too. I don’t expect *ACCatalyst* readers will agree with him, yet printing his response is helpful.

An old-fashioned Liberal might have given a more definite response.

Niall Reid’s theme more often is to keep an open mind, not wanting to be definite about the Christian’s hope in the supernatural.

His deft post-Modern response is suspicious of meta-narrative and fits our times. For those of us wishing to proclaim historic Christianity it is surely helpful to know where others are heading.

But you don’t have to take my word for it, the point is you can read for yourself, here. And it might be worth noting that *ACCatalyst* seeks to engage with the leaders of the UCA. We are not here to take potshots from behind a barricade.

*John Sandeman*

*ACCatalyst* is published by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc.  
 ABN 73 794 518 715 ARBN 128 001 785.  
 Incorporated in NSW. INC 9887628.  
 Liability of members is limited. Opinions expressed in *ACCatalyst* do not necessarily reflect the official views of the assembly.

Executive Editor: Max Champion  
 Managing Editor: Peter Bentley  
 Editor: John Sandeman  
 Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW  
 02 9550 5358  
 Website: [confessingcongregations.com](http://confessingcongregations.com)  
[accoffice@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:accoffice@confessingcongregations.com)

Email for *ACCatalyst*:  
[catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:catalysteditor@confessingcongregations.com)  
*ACCatalyst* is available as a subscription only (\$35pa) or by becoming an ACC Supporting Member (\$35pa concession or \$60pa full)  
 Printed by Brougham Press, Scoresby Rd, Bayswater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

When you squeeze a tube of toothpaste, what do you suppose comes out? Toothpaste of course. And if you squeeze a tube of condensed milk, what comes out? Condensed milk. So, with a tube of anything, when you squeeze it, whatever is inside will come out. This, I suppose is not rocket science.

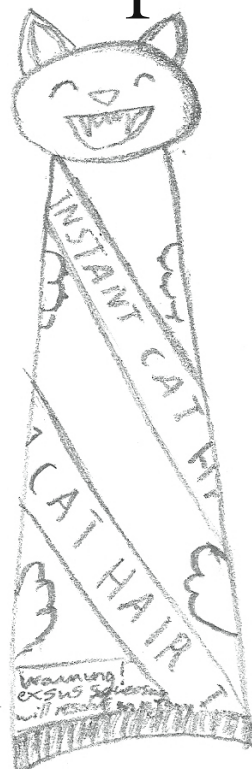
Ever feel like you are being squeezed? Sometimes stress, busyness, poor health or personal attack can make us feel squeezed, and what comes out of us at those times can be a bit of a shock, even to ourselves.

I usually try to be polite, respectful and patient with people I meet. That’s the sort of person I want to be. But I have times when I feel under pressure and the grumpy, impatient and selfish Robyn starts to appear. Believe me, that’s not a nice thing.

So, is the answer to be happy all the time so the bad side of us never comes out? Nobody can go through life without being squeezed now and then.

Amazingly enough the Bible says not a word about toothpaste. But it

## Toothpaste



Hilary Sandeman

does talk about God refining us like gold. What they did with gold was put it in a big pot and heat it up until

it melted and all the impurities, i.e. the bad bits came to the surface and then they were scooped off. God is not satisfied with simply helping us conceal our inner grumpiness. Sometimes he lets us feel squeezed so the bad stuff comes to the surface, where he is ever willing to take it all upon himself and give us his right attitude instead.

But in the meantime, all of us are works in progress as far as God is concerned. For this reason we all need to be open and receptive to the work of God’s Spirit in us.

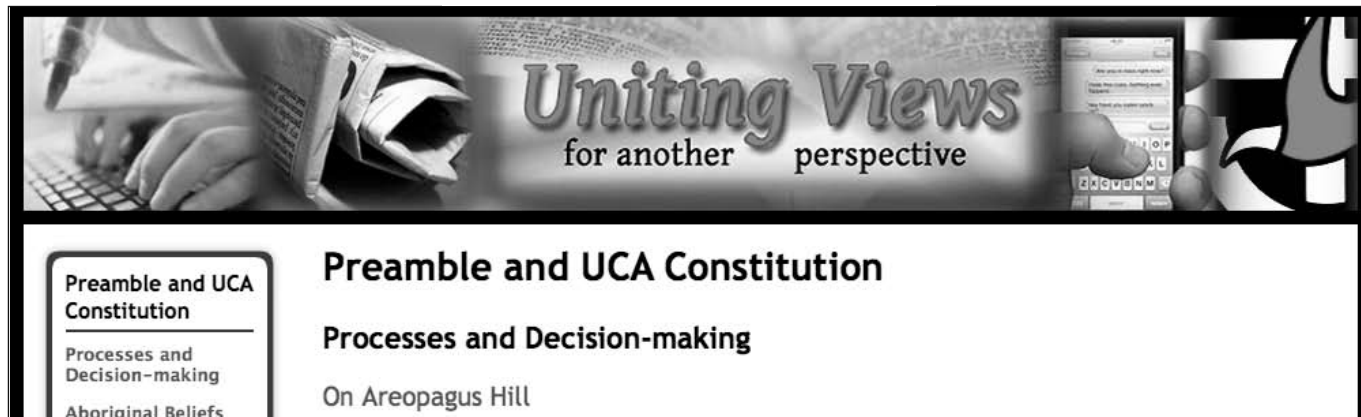
Also we need to be patient with each other, as we can never be sure what kind of squeezing time another person is going through. They might just need some encouragement or a listening ear to help them through.

The great thing is, God does not expect us to make ourselves perfect.

And as Paul says in Philippians 1:6 God is the one who began this work in you, and I am certain that he won’t stop before it is complete.

*Robyn*

# Lost opportunity as the new preamble is approved



**Unitingviews.com has detailed analysis of the UCA preamble and indigenous religion**

A press release dated November 26, 2010 confirmed what anyone aware of Uniting Church processes would have known would take place—the numbers had been brought together and the new preamble approved. A majority of the Synods and 2/3 of presbyteries were required to vote Yes for approval.

Only three Presbyteries did not approve the new preamble, though we do not know how close some of the votes were. One presbytery voted no on a casting vote. As the press release issued by the UCA Assembly stated: “The preamble to the Uniting Church constitution was passed by the 12th Assembly in 2009 and subsequently passed by the Synods and Presbyteries (the Church’s state-based and regional councils) throughout 2010, as is required for constitutional change. Revisions to the text have been developed after extensive consultation throughout the church and in particular with the UAICC and Indigenous Uniting Church members.”

I acknowledge the last part and wholeheartedly agree that consultation is a good thing, and especially consultation with the UAICC and indigenous members, but where was this “extensive consultation throughout the church”. Consultation on earlier versions was limited by scope, time and method, and the final version which came to Assembly for decision came so late I do not believe members would have had time to give it the serious attention it de-

served before they were caught in the dynamics of a difficult and emotional debate which was itself curtailed. The words “extensive consultation” or even a nudge to the mantra of the inter-conciliar formula of the UCA is more about providing spin for public consumption, especially when the UCA commends the Australian Government on the decision to undertake a referendum on the recognition of Aboriginal and Islander people in the Australian Constitution. I recognise that spin is something all political parties do and churches often undertake, but sometimes I hope for a better approach. In the UCA case, it is more of an irony given that for some other important matters the argument has often been “the church or group is not ready, more time is needed, or that we need to sit down together and work through this for the long-term”.

Debate about the approved version of the new preamble was truncated as amendments were not possible and polarisation was enhanced by the process. I doubt if many councils were swayed by arguments at the meetings and most probably voted without really considering the theological concerns that had been validly raised. At my presbytery meeting one person’s argument was founded on the idea that they (Congress) wanted this and would be devastated if it was not approved. This may have swung some people, but certainly illustrated the base of the push. Another person at one

Synod implied that we had to follow the “pastoral approach”, basically giving people what they wanted as Jesus did. I am not sure where Jesus’ harder sayings fit into this theology.

That is why this was a lost opportunity. I have often commented that the Assembly finds it difficult to get things right in terms of process, decision-making and communication—look at the continued debacles about sexuality. UCA Theologian Michael Owen mentioned in his open letter that this type of constitutional change needed a time frame of ten years. At the very minimum I suggest it should have been three more years.

The new preamble could have been sent out for consideration and feedback— not decision. This would have enabled substantial dialogue and also given real opportunity to congregations to engage in the process. I believe this would have enabled a better outcome and hopefully resulted in at least revamping those sections that had been hastily revised just before the 12th Assembly met and consequently approved for a Yes or No decision only.

I believe that now probably few members even know what has changed, but for a section of the church they have again been alienated because of the process. I can only hope the Australian Government does not follow the same process but allows for a good and long period of dialogue and consultation.

*Peter Bentley*



ctsale/istockphoto.com

## PUBLIC SQUARE

B Y P S E U D O - M A X I M U S

### Radio Fihaki

On 28 January ABC's *Pacific Beat* featured the Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki, Deputy chair of ACC, the Rev Terence Corkin, General Secretary of the UCA and the Rev Tavake Tupou (NZ). They were discussing whether Pacific Island congregations and others could break away from the UCA over the issue of homosexuality.

Rev Tupou spoke of reluctantly leading congregations out of the Methodist Church in New Zealand because of the clash between "two different belief systems".

Rev Fihaki reaffirmed the ACC's commitment to the ecumenical faith of the church and its statement on apostasy in the UCA, a term which the Rev Corkin described as "unhelpful" and "inappropriate".

There was a sharp exchange on the question of the level of dissent within migrant-ethnic and indigenous congregations.

Rev Corkin left the impression that there was a great diversity of opinion within these groups; Rev Fihaki reminded him of the unequivocal declarations of opposition to the decisions of the 2003 Assembly from their National Conferences.

A crucial question for migrant-ethnic congregations, and others, is whether they can continue to stay within the UCA.

Rev Fihaki reaffirmed ACC's commitment to work "within the UCA". Rev Corkin said that the UCA had left space in which dialogue could continue. Rev Tupou believed that schism would come.

More at <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/pacbeat/stories/201101/s3124447.htm>

### Australian Identity

Australia Day reflections are always predictable. In "Start the anthem of complaints" (*The Weekend Australian, Inquirer* 22-23/1/11, p8) Bob Murray predicts "that there will be all the usual complaints about the day, the flag, the national anthem, the Constitution, the head of state and the federal system." He argues that there is no real choice on which day to celebrate. "Modern Australian society was founded in Sydney on January 26, 1788."

His claim that "it led to one of the world's better societies" is contested by some indigenous people, republicans and human rights activists. Australian identity is not easily identified! Constantly appealing to mateship is too flippant and constant whingeing about inequalities is too solemn to do justice to the complex historical, theological and cultural traditions that have formed our social fabric.

The pros and cons of Australian identity will continue to be hotly debated on many fronts. That debate will be seriously compromised if the proposed national history curriculum in schools is not changed to include the history of Christianity.

In its present form, students would be excused for thinking that our political, legal, educational, medical and welfare institutions have nothing to do with the Church's commitment to human dignity and the search for truth. Nor would they be exposed to ideological clashes between church and state, and within churches and states, over matters of theological, scientific and ethical importance in the formation of Western civilization.

Hopefully the architects of the na-

tional history curriculum will take the advice of the editor of *Talking Point* (*The Australian*, 31/12/10, p13) that "Good and bad, the church must rate a mention in history."

More importantly, the churches need to be jolted out of complacency about their importance in Australian society. Is it not the time to reaffirm the truth of the Gospel of Christ in the public square and to teach the faith with a theological and historical depth that has been absent in a nominally "Christian" country?

### Twittering

At *Public Square* we're hard pressed to keep up with new forms of social networking. *Facebook* has its virtues, but *Twitter*? The inane texting of our every move and thought is symptomatic of a self-absorbed society desperate to wring meaning from our very ordinary lives. At least it can be used to let others know our plans.

But now comes a sinister offshoot: *self-tracking*. Sarah Wilson tells of growing interest in recording the details of our entire lives online. (*The Australian Weekend Magazine*, 29-30/1/11) Self-trackers record everything—diet, exercise, moods, fears, expenses, sleep, appointments etc. "There's an app for pretty much every human neurosis or weakness in need of good monitoring."

An online community goes by the name of *The Quantified Self*. It is naively assumed that self-trackers will improve themselves simply by carefully noting every detail of their lives.

We shouldn't be surprised. Societies that displace the quest for truth with the search to satisfy our individual desires inevitably become self-ab-

sorbed. The corrosive effects of being so curved in on oneself (Luther) can be tracked in our post-Christian age.

It is time for the church to be bold-er in reminding our neighbours that identity is given in Christ, who judges and forgives our self-absorption and frees us to glorify God and serve others. In the poem "Who am I?" (1944) Bonhoeffer tracks the views of others and himself about his identity as a Christian pastor in a concentration camp. He ends with words that can bring hope even to self-trackers: "Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.



## Designer babies 1

The brave new world of Aldous Huxley is upon us. Recently it was reported that a couple with three boys had aborted twin boys conceived through IVF.

Understandably grief-stricken over the earlier death of a baby daughter they said that the mother's psychological health would be imperilled if she was denied the right to choose the sex of the child.

In "Designer baby desire will cheapen the value of life" (*The Weekend Australian* 22-23/1/11 p14) Christopher Pearson questions the now common use of arguments about potential harm to the mother to justify abortion or the selection of a child's sex. He also asks why expensive, publicly-funded IVF programs should be wasted to accommodate their ideal expectations.

He describes their decision as "an essentially frivolous response" to a disappointing situation. "It tells us that for this couple, it's all about them and their sense of their own needs and entitlements. They have commodified their notional offspring in a way that's more in keeping with Mao's China than modern Australia."

Perhaps, for all that divides us, "modern Australia" is not so different from China when it comes to the sanctity of life.

It is frightening to note that this episode did not lead to public outrage—as it surely would have if the twins had been girls or the mother had been traumatised by psychological fears that the boys would be born black or homosexual.

## Designer babies 2

Elsewhere same-sex couples line up in the media to demand the right to have children. "Tying the knot" (*The Weekend Australian* 15-16/1/11) portrays gay and lesbian couples as happy families with children. *The Age* (23/1/11) lauds the decision of a single gay man to have a child conceived by surrogacy.

To the gushing delight of a string of celebrities Elton John and David Furnish welcomed the arrival of a son on Christmas Day. As the surrogate mother carried a donor egg, little Zachary has two fathers and two mothers.

*The Guardian's* Zoe Williams is typical of the euphoric nonsense surrounding the birth. "There are sound reasons to think they'll be good parents."

After all they have the wealth to give him anything he wants! She insists that all right thinking people should embrace their happiness and reject the final twitching of homophobia in our midst. "Of course, the

real objection isn't to the age of the parent, indeed, it has nothing to do with parents or children. Rather, it's a reaction against the audacity of choice." (*The Age*, 3/1/11, p9)

There you have it. The "audacity of choice" is ultimate. To hell with the commodification of children and the destruction of marriage grounded in the biological complementarity of the parents! What matters is our entitlement to choose children that suit our needs or desires.

No wonder that many children and parents involved in such complex birthing arrangements have formed an organisation called *Tangledwebs Inc* to alert the public to the trauma often experienced by families in such seemingly altruistic situations.

No wonder, too, that the mainstream media ignores them, just as they ignore homosexuals like Roger Phillips (*The Weekend Australian Magazine* 29-30/1/11, p4), who say that "same-sex parenting must surely have a confusing influence on a child's development."

*All items this issue by Max Champion*

## IAN CLARKSON

### The peaceful red gum—by another name?

Throughout the area where I live and indeed in many parts of Australia we have seen and smelled the rich creamy perfume of their flowering: The mighty, Red Gum.

They start flowering in December around the start of Advent and go through to early February. This year their flowering has been abundant, some as if helicopters had sprinkled plain flour all over them!

For me, the flowering of these heavy trunked Reds, is the sign heralding Christmas. I love them! Try an evening walk amongst them on a still warm night—the aroma is lovely. And not only the perfume, they ooze nectar, the heaviest yielders of honey of any tree in the world!

These are the most characteristic of all Australian Eucalypts, probably because they are the only species that grow all over Australia, especially in river courses, dry or wet, and uniquely on tops of hills as they do in the hills behind us.

But why are they botanically

called "camaldulensis"? Well, because this most Australian of all Australian native trees was first noted by a botanist growing as a cultivated tree in a garden of the Camulduli religious order in Naples, Italy!

Its name is nothing to do with what it really is—its magnificent shape, its vast range of climatic tolerance, its most durable and beautiful dense, red timber (I once calculated that the seed of one tree could supply timber to build houses for a city the size of Adelaide, and wood too hard for termites to take one bite!), its delicious aroma! None of these! Labeled so . . . so, inadequately—by a botanical expert—and the name sticks!

But they indifferently keep on doing their own thing—true to themselves—and that at every Advent, blessing us with symbols and sermons: silent beauty, peaceful might, gentle rustling joy. Hospitable to scores of insects, grubs and sundry creatures.

One day, dear Red Gum, you will be given, like we the redeemed, your true name! *Eucalyptus Nativitas!* Clap your hands!

# Not apologetic about marriage

Thank you for the Oct 2010 *ACCatalyst* and "The Future of Marriage in Australia".

There have always been cultural-historical variations to an understanding of what marriage means. I suspect that when our Prime Minister said that "Marriage is not religious, it is historical and cultural" she was saying that Christians do not have a monopoly on marriage. For instance persons who practise polygamy may consider themselves well and truly married.

In our culture we have Common law Marriage, Civil Marriage and the option of a Christian Marriage and ceremony. When relationships extend beyond marriage we use different terms such as co-habitation, bigamy, polygamy etc. but even when considering different cultures it is worth noting that marriage has always had a male-female gender base.

Christians however should not adopt a militant position in an attempt to stand in the way of secular society choosing different values, neither should Christians be apologetic or slow to say that God's way builds happier, healthier longer lives and communities.

As it has been said, if society wants to fashion a different meaning to the marriage relationship it should create its own name and its own boundaries. What is of deep concern is that a small vocal minority believe that their self worth depends on changing the meaning of marriage and gives them the right to promote the rejection of a Christian heritage that in our culture has provided for and undergirded the basis for our national life.

*Rev E. A. (Ted) Curnow*

## "Fan into flames the gift of God, which is in you".

I was travelling to Ulverstone by bus because I had handed in my licence because of difficulties. I had been invited by the Ulverstone minister, the Rev. Deva Sugirtharaj to be guest preacher at a celebratory dinner to recognise the inauguration of the UCA.

Over seventy people from most of the congregations on the North West Coast of Tasmania would be there. The bus drew to a stop at Ulverstone and because I could not see Deva I thought there would be another stop further on.

To my horror as the bus continued on it turned on the highway and headed for Penguin. I went to the front and told the driver that I should have left the bus in Ulverstone and asked if could he stop the bus and let me alight.

He said "I announced Ulverstone, didn't you hear me, I can't stop yet." Ultimately I alighted to find myself in suburbia and surrounded by

houses all looking empty and unfriendly. No mobile phone, available taxi or bus so I started to walk.

After two blocks I saw a corner shop. Inside was a friendly grocer. I said to him, "Can you help?" Sure if I can", he said. His wife joined him and I gave him two phone numbers to ring. Ultimately he found Deva who came and picked me up.

On the way home in the bus I began to think about that incident. Firstly it was entirely my own fault.

If I had been attentive I would have heard the driver. I must take full responsibility for my mistake.

Secondly when I committed my life to God He did not promise me a sure and comfortable passage through life. Thirdly I was born with eyes to see, ears to hear, and arms and feet to use. God expects me to use the "gifts of God" which are within me.

Because of my mistake, I met and had a meaningful conversation with this friendly shopkeeper and his wife. Paul wrote "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7)."

*Rev. Bob Imms, Tasmania*

## Good news?

Last Sunday I came across a copy of the December 2010 issue of *Insights* and, because I am somewhat concerned at some aspects of the article "What is our primary purpose?" by Niall Reid, I would very much appreciate your opinion on it.

While it seems to set out Niall's

identification of the Great Commission statements as taken from the gospels, in my reading he suggests that the only thing that really counts is "doing good"—in other words, good works; and that there is really no need to be concerned about a person's life after death. Thanks, God bless, and have a great year,

*Brian E Semmler (read on...ed)*



**W**hat does not involve an ethical decision? This is a question I have

been considering during the long debate about ethics classes.

For those outside of NSW you may not have been aware of a significant debate during 2010 about the trial of ethics classes in NSW state schools. A significant issue for churches was the provision of the classes at the same time as Religious Education. Presently those children who do not undertake RE are provided with time for personal study, usually in the library.

Having the classes at the same time was considered by most churches (not the Uniting Church in NSW) to impinge upon the rights of children to also undertake RE, and to allow those doing RE to undertake ethics courses.

Having read the material that is publicly available I developed a sense of unease, coupled with my personal thought that this was a marvellously naive approach, but then this is partly determined by what one thinks of human nature. Having a dimmer view of human nature in general or at least less than those involved in this project (not withstanding the amazing common grace shown in disasters and difficult situations).

One Parent Ethics Class Facilitator on *Youtube* states “What has been the most difficult thing in facilitating the discussion was actually encouraging the children that there was no right or wrong answer, that what they thought was valid. It could be different to what their friends thought. So [we were] just getting them to know that it’s okay to think differently [from] others as long as you respect the other people when you are disagreeing with them.”

The project author Professor Phil Cam (Associate Professor, School of History and Philosophy, UNSW) clearly outlines: “In terms of education first of all there is a very big difference between Ethical inquiry and moral instruction—in moral instruction we think that we already have all the answers to how people should behave about character and conduct

## It’s official: ‘No right or wrong, answers’

and we try to inculcate that in children by telling them what to think and what to do. In ethical inquiry on the other hand we actually have open questions.”

I fully understand the basis of the trial classes, and the approach adopted. Having grown up being encouraged to read and think for myself, I love inquiry, but this was not done in a vacuum without moral pointers and considerations. I also had the advantage of reading works of literature which grappled with moral and ethical situations. If one teaches ethical inquiry, it is helpful to acknowledge that everyone has an agenda and a philosophy that helps to determine their reasoning or at least provide some criteria for reasoning.

In the *NSW Ethics Trial Course Report (Evaluation October 2010)*, there are some interesting conclusions and recommendations, and it is helpful reading, especially for the discussion of the basis of ethics. I want to comment on part of the trial evaluation based around examination of responses to six questions (before and after the courses).

1. Working out whether lying to your friend is wrong
2. Thinking whether to have shorter showers to save water
3. Working out whether it is cruel to keep animals in zoos
4. Thinking about what you want to watch on T.V.
5. Deciding which sport to play
6. Deciding whom to ask to your party

The report states: “Items 1, 2 and 3 were included as clear examples of ethical issues. Items 4 and 5 were included as clear examples of ‘Not Ethical’ issues, based as they are on face value as simple matters of personal choice. Item 6, ‘Deciding whom to ask to your party’, was included as a more complex example that might be classified as either ‘Ethical’ or ‘Non

Ethical’ depending on participants’ personal experiences. (pp 60-61)”

My view is that this approach is inadequate, as I believe there are ethical implications of all these questions. From my extensive interviewing of children during many projects in the last decade, a key question for me has been how do children today develop moral reasoning skills that lead to decision-making? A basis that kept coming to the fore was a type of situational ethics approach based around their community of the time, mostly their peers and whether they had good “experiences”. The ethical inquiry approach is designed to promote a community of respect and collaboration, but it needs to do more if it is to create a genuine community of understanding. One danger of the inquiry approach is that it does not seem to take into account the complex lives of children today and the wider ethical debate in which the world now operates due to environmental and world situations.

A significant area for example is the pornification of children. The danger in any system that lacks a code of right and wrong is that children will follow what they see and experience. Pornography wants to give the impression that it is a mutual loving experience, and that all sexual practices are equally valid. Provocative episodes on the special edition of *The Sex Education Show - vs pornography* (UK) about children and pornography by journalist Anna Richardson, left me with no doubt that our society is on the verge of a cataclysmic shift in moral values that have wider implications than sex.

The scenes where a group of parents are shown the images of what their children have been viewing are simply eye-opening (the camera shows the incredulous reactions of the parents and then their discussion). The estimate for one’s first viewing of explicit pornography in the UK is now 11 years. Perhaps there are ethical questions about what one watches on TV, especially as the internet and TV converge? Needless to say, the present NSW Government confirmed the trial course as a success, and the developing party (St James Ethics Centre in Sydney) has stated it is committed to starting the courses in Term 1 this year. *Peter Bentley*

moderator, niall reid

> called to be generous

[click here for previous columns](#)



## What is our primary purpose?

I picked up the October issue of *ACCatalyst* and read the article on Brian Medway's booklet *The Primary Purpose: Rediscovering the Biblical Reason for Church*, which speaks of the Great Commission.

In May I had been encouraged to read the *The Primary Purpose* by one of my predecessors, the Rev. John Mallison. He directed me to the positive affirmation given to the booklet by another of my predecessors, the Rev. Dr Gordon Dicker:

"I could not agree more with Brian's thesis. The Great Commission is the solid rock on which our calling as Christian disciples stands. We do not hold it consistently in front of ourselves and the church as a whole as much as we should. His article challenges me deeply."

The article essentially argues that Christians in the western world have forgotten their primary purpose, which is to proclaim the gospel.

Key words in the Great Commission statements in the four gospels indicate that the primary purpose is about

- preaching the kingdom to the whole world (Matt. 24:14);
- making disciples of all nations and teaching obedience to everything Jesus has commanded (Matt. 28:19ff);
- preaching the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15); and
- preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins and being witnesses to Jesus (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

But what is that gospel?

Christopher Hitchens, dying of oesophagus cancer, was interviewed by Tony Jones on the ABC's *7:30 Report*. On November 17, Tony Jones asked him if facing death caused him to doubt his atheist stance for him

### EVANGELISM

# The Primary Purpose

Brian Medway on what church is for

Christian faith has lost its way in the western world. It is my intention in this paper to suggest that the problem has to do with a simple abdication of God's primary purpose. What is worse than losing our way is the fact that we have been able to cover up this loss for so long. What is worse still is the fact that our culturally-compromised way of following Jesus has been held up as the model to many other parts of the world.

The reality is that we are the least effective churches in the world. We have taken on almost every aspect of the Laodicean church described by Jesus in Revelation 3. It seems that our best subject is producing more of division and crass competitiveness. Add to that our penchant for moral compromise and you have a recipe for disaster. It is no wonder that Brother Yun, a Chinese Christian leader refers to the toxic effect that western Christianity had on the Chinese church from the moment some access to China was regained in the latter part of the 19th century.

less-demanding peripheral thing well, instead of doing the most important thing at all. After all, you can count on mint leaves. Justice and mercy are much harder to draw boundaries around and feel self satisfied about.

This shift and diffusion of purpose has not happened suddenly. It is the result of the steady undermining influence of our secular culture and its appeal to what the New Testament refers to as "the flesh". Non-primary things have been allowed to sneak in and supplant what is genuinely primary.

None of these substitutes are bad things in and of themselves. The bad thing happens as a result of what they displace. These substitute preoccupations have supplanted a common passion and love for rescuing lost people. It is not wrong to pray or to worship. It is not wrong to discuss theories of the second coming. It is not wrong to

# Purpose

Church is for

It is about a good thing becoming so important that it excludes and sets aside the revealed primary purpose. Whenever a right thing is in the wrong place, it becomes a wrong thing. Here are some samples:

Bible Study, Worship services, Intercessory Prayer, Conferences, Events, Spiritual Gifts, Church structures, Theological Systems, Counselling, Prayer Summits, City Transformation.

I can hear people reacting to some idea that I am criticizing or seeking to diminish the essential importance of these emphases. The issue here is whether any of them are primary/ultimate. On the basis of Scripture the answer must be "No, no never". If we ask the question as to whether it is possible for good-hearted believers to give themselves to one or more of these and ignore their responsibility to go and preach the gospel to every person, the answer is, "Yes, unfortunately, yes". All of them are tools and means of grace to enable us to fulfil the only declared mission...

## John Mallison on why you should read "The Primary Purpose" by Brian Medway

I am well aware that your church is one that does take our Lord's Great Commission seriously. However I felt sure you would appreciate *The Primary Purpose* by Brian Medway which I believe could have major impact, especially in evangelical circles.

Brian heads up an independent missional church called Grace Canberra. He is now national chair of Cross-Link Network an association of independent evangelical churches throughout our nation. Following the encouragement of a number of us in



# ‘Keeping the main thing the main thing’

Brian Medway’s *The Primary Purpose* which ran in the last two *ACCatalysts*, was intended to get a reaction. It did. NSW/ACT UCA Moderator Niall Reid responded in *Insights*, his synod’s magazine (left and at [www.insights.uca.org.au](http://www.insights.uca.org.au)), and asked an important question: “But what is that Gospel”. Ian Weeks of the ACC NSW movement replies below. We also interviewed Niall Reid to get more of his answer to his own question, and former Moderator Gordon Dicker also analyses Reid’s article.

*Ian Weeks* “Paul describes the Gospel as being about Jesus’ physical death, physical burial, physical resurrection”.

**I** was at a conference recently where the Bible Study leader, commenting on 1 Corinthians 15, said for Paul “*the main thing is that the Main Thing is the main thing!*” This was a timely reminder as I consider the recent interest in Catalyst articles focusing on the primacy of evangelism as our reason for existing (October 2010 “The Primary Purpose of the Church”, by Brian Medway). Particularly encouraging was to read in the NSW/ACT Synod’s monthly magazine *Insights* that the Moderator had read Brian’s article and affirmed that “The Great Commission is the solid rock on which our calling as Christian disciples stands.” (*Insights* December 2010 p2).

What perplexed me however was a question that the Moderator put: “But what is the Gospel?” I was per-

plexed because what followed this question didn’t seem to describe a Gospel that I am familiar with, or that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15.

Having confronted the Corinthian Church with the issues to which he has been alerted, Paul finally gets the opportunity to tell them what is really important, and hence we have that wonderful chapter of Gospel explanation at the end of his letter. If we were to ask Paul “What is the Gospel?”, his response would be that of Ch 15 vv 1 – 5:

*“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”* (NIV, emphasis mine).

Paul describes the Gospel as being about Jesus’ physical death, physical burial, physical resurrection, and physical appearances. What’s more, Paul directly links

# WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Jesus' death to our sins ("for our sins" v3), reminding the Corinthians that by this Gospel they are saved (v2).

**T**his statement of Paul means that, contrary to the Moderator's statement in the *Insights* article, the Gospel is very much about heaven and hell, for we have been, and will be rescued from, the dreadful consequence of our sin: death and destruction (hell), and instead, by God's grace and mercy, given new and eternal fellowship with God (heaven).

Certainly a consequence of surrendering our wills to the Lordship of Him who died for our sins, was buried, was raised, and lives to reign will automatically mean following and trusting God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit "no matter what" as the Moderator urges, and living lives of disciplined Godliness so as to change the world around us. But to suggest that the Gospel message can be explained as "God who has a heart for the world, comes to the world, offers himself to the world out of an overwhelming love for it and a belief in the possibilities in the hearts of those who dwell upon it" is selling the Gospel very short and to miss the main thing. God doesn't believe in us—He knows us! He knows all our guilt and shame, our sin and deceitfulness, our disobedience and rebellion; and yet chooses to love us! What's more, God loves us too much to leave us in this condition! Christ died for our sins!! O that wonderful, glorious truth of penal substitutionary atonement! The transforming work of the Holy Spirit! Praise God for His grace and mercy.

If we are to be obedient to the Lord's Great Commission (Matt 28), and effective in evangelism, disciple making, and social transformation, then we need to make sure that the Main Thing is the main thing; that the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection remains the focus of our preaching, teaching, pastoral care, meetings, mission planning, social interaction, and good deeds. This is our primary purpose. This is what will grow disciples and congregations, and transform communities, and reform and renew the Church.

*Ian Weeks is Pastor of Belrose Uniting Church and Chair of the ACC NSW Committee.*

## Niall Reid "actually sharing the Gospel is about relationship..."

*Niall, You responded in Insights to the ACCatalyst article by Brian Medway and asked a really good question "what is the Gospel?" What is the Gospel?*

That was a question I was asked when I was a theological student when I was in my last year. I think it is something that has exercised my mind ever since. I don't think its something that has a formulaic answer although maybe that's wrong ... It seems to me that the Gospel simply is the news that every person is loved by God, every person is in the image of God and has the capacity to be if you like Gods person— someone who is in relationship to God.

I suppose ultimately it is about the potential of that relationship with God that we can realise through our

knowledge of Jesus Christ.

*Do you think you are talking about the same Gospel as Brian Medway, or (former NSW Moderators) Gordon Dicker or John Mallison?*

I am sure we probably express things differently but I think there would also be intersections.

Although I was impressed with what Brian Medway had to say, I suppose [his article] was more about what we have to take into account in the great commission. What we are to be about is sharing the gospel—which I probably take more broadly than making a statement or sharing a belief, but actually sharing the Gospel is about relationship. Relationship both with God and relationship with other human beings—what that looks like.

*I wonder if what they are on about is a John 3:16 Gospel which is about rescuing people, from hell perhaps? With the promise of eternal life. That seems to be something you are sceptical about.*

I don't know if sceptical is the right word but I don't think essentially it is about saving people from Hell, I think salvation is about experiencing a relationship with God. I suppose [it is about] experiencing life that has some sense of purpose and hope. Maybe it is saving us from hopelessness. And if that is Hell, well, fine.

*Do you believe in everlasting life?*

I don't know what that looks like, I don't know how to understand that. But I believe in God who is with me now, today tomorrow and even beyond this life, whatever that looks like.

To me in the end, that is not my concern. Because I trust in God I don't need to worry about that. Because I know that whatever that looks like, whatever it is, it is in God's hands, [and] that I can trust him.

I may have avoided the question slightly but by saying "I believe in this" it is saying that is what is important, but to me that is not the fundamental thing. The fundamental thing is the relationship with God.

*Accepting that you are absolutely right that the fundamental thing is the relationship with God, is that a relationship that lasts until we die or is that a relationship that goes beyond the grave?*

To me it's a relationship in which I trust in God for what lies beyond when I die. I don't know what that will look like. I don't really know exactly what it means. So fundamentally to me because of the relationship I have with God, I trust in God for whatever that looks like.

What I don't want to do is say I believe in some particular manifestation of that because I can't imagine what that looks like.

That does not mean it doesn't exist. It just means that I don't want to give the impression that I believe in eternal life in the sense of we are going to be in this perfect world that looks like this world and we just keep on living for ever and ever and ever. I can't comprehend that.

But equally I can't comprehend death in the sense of "there is nothing for ever and ever and ever". It's either end of that spectrum [that] I can't comprehend. But I can comprehend trusting in God for whatever that future may be.

*Something you seemed in your article to be more definite about was that Hell does not exist.*

Well again it depends what you mean by that. If you mean the typical image of Hell that is where people burn for ever and ever eternally with pain and suffering, no I don't believe in that.



That's partly because that God I know—the God of grace and love and hope—is not the God that would do that. To anyone.

*So people who don't share your relationship with God while they are alive, what happens to them?*

Well again, it's in God's hands. So just as I can't imagine eternal life that goes on and on, I can't imagine eternal death. But I think the worst that it is is extinction. I think if we look at the biblical images of Hell, certainly one can draw the inferences of the image I have already given but I actually think it is about destruction, ending finishing.

That's a possibility. I can believe that might be okay, that it might be what happens. So I think people have to contemplate that.

*So for you the good news is about living a good life, now.*

The good news is about the possibility of living in relationship with God, trusting in God in this life and not having fear about what is beyond because you have that relationship with God. It's a bit like as a child you trust your parent to keep you safe even though you don't actually know how they are going to do that. You don't necessarily understand it all but you have that trust in them. Not all children maybe can but certainly that would be the image.

That trust is what enables you to have this sense of hope about whatever the future holds.

*Niall, have you always believed what you are saying now or have your views shifted?*

Well, I have always said if someone is a person of faith their views about things have to change, because none of us has a perfect understanding. So sometimes as we get glimpses of what the Spirit speaks to us we had better change. So inevitably my views have changed over the years as I have reflected on things as I have been a part of the Christian community, as I have read the Bible, as I have studied it, as I interact with other people. So it would certainly have changed over the years.

*What do you think the role in the UCA is for people who have a more evangelical understanding of these issues?*

Well I have said my view is evangelical: it's about the good news, it's about sharing the good news. That particular definition of evangelical might be different to mine.

*It's a word these days that everybody wants.*

I have not changed. I have never felt I am not evangelical. I don't know, for some people it is a word they still don't want because maybe there are some connotations but it seems to me if we are on about the Gospel then it is about the good news, the evangel, so we must be evangelical.

But if you mean is there room for people who have a more conservative view of these matters well obviously there is always room for people of different views. It is as we share our differences we grow in our faith and understanding. We gain knowledge from other people's understanding of their faith.

For me personally my view of myself is that I am a Christian. I don't particularly like to label myself. I am a follower of Jesus Christ and seek to respond to his message of salvation. I think that's a good place to be.

*Is Heaven for nice people?*

Heaven is to me about being where God is. Heaven is God's place. Heaven is not absolutely defined as somewhere up in the sky at the end of life. Heaven is wherever God is present so there is a sense in which heaven exists even now. Jesus talks about the kingdom of heaven being near ... We can enter into it now.

Heaven is something, again, we need to think more broadly than that sort of traditional image

Heaven for nice people? No heaven is wherever we are connecting to God, we maybe experiencing something of heaven.

The fulfillment of that may well be down the track.

I think all sorts of people may experience heaven. And sometimes they will experience it and sometimes they will be outside of it. It's something that is really about where God is.

*So why did Jesus die?*

Why did Jesus die? Jesus died to show us the way, and to show us the heart of God. In Christ's death we see there is a God who is prepared to offer, sacrifice in a sense, his very being so that creation, human beings, may see a different way, a different sort of power a different sort of understanding of what it is that makes for real life. And what it is to be real humans.

*UCA NSW/ACT Moderator Niall Reid interviewed by John Sandeman*

# WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

*Gordon Dicker* “But what is that gospel?’ The moderator never really answers that question.”

**I**n the December 2010 issue of *Insights*, the monthly magazine of the NSW/ACT Synod, the Moderator, Niall Reid, comments on Brian Medway’s booklet, *The Primary Purpose: Rediscovering the Biblical Reason for Church*. He notes the “Great Commission” statements in the three Synoptic Gospels, which he summarises as:

- preaching the kingdom to the whole world;
- making disciples of all nations and teaching obedience to everything Jesus has commanded;
- preaching the good news to all creation;
- preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins and being witnesses to Jesus.

Having followed the Moderator’s comments thus far I expected that he would go on to support Medway’s plea that the Church should take the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19 ff) more seriously, but he figuratively throws up his hands with the question, “But what is that gospel?” He never really answers that question. Instead he expresses his disagreement with some religious people who try to convert and save others from going to hell and he directs readers to the Christmas stories which express the gospel that God comes to the world and demonstrates God’s overwhelming love for all creation and every person.

Perhaps that is all that could be said in the space the Moderator was allowed but it is a pity that he was not able to say more about the content of the gospel and the meaning of discipleship. My experience in the church over a long period leads me to believe that there is not a very good understanding of either gospel or discipleship.

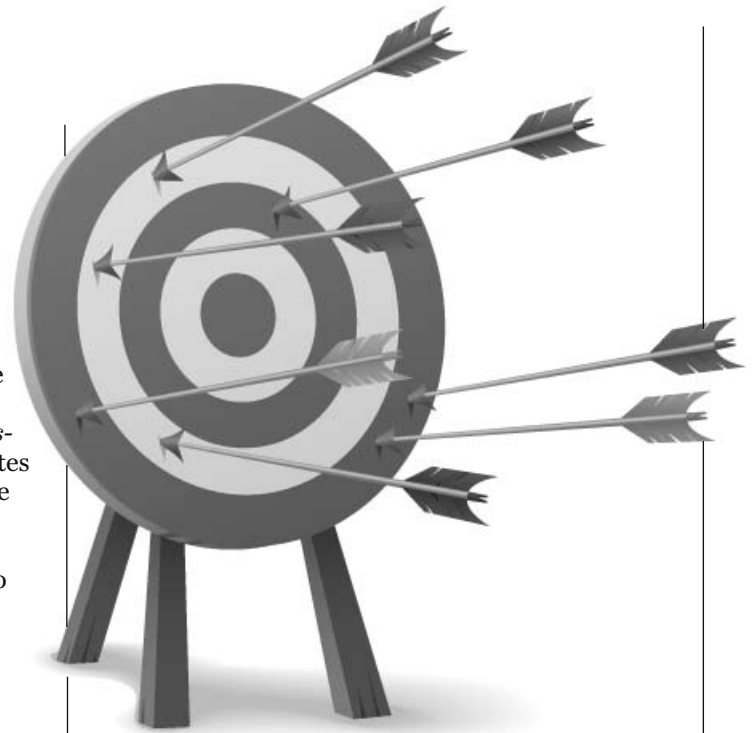
Gospel is a very churchy word today, but the Greek word that it translates, *euangelion*, was a quite secular word in the time of Jesus and his followers. It literally meant “good news” and was used by emperors and generals to signify the proclamation of great victories. In the early church it was used to signify the proclamation by Jesus of the coming and nearness of the kingdom of God.

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus the term was used of the preaching of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The statement of the bare facts was not the good news. What made it gospel was the affirmation that the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus were all for us and through Jesus forgiveness and new life are offered to all people.

From the kernel of the apostolic preaching, good news implications flow out in many directions and it is the exploration of this outflow which is the task of those who are called to proclaim the gospel today.

Not everything Jesus said was good news and not every telling of the Jesus story is good news; sometimes the retelling of the story can be changed into bad news. There are also other tests that can be applied to separate the Christian gospel from other false gospels.

Firstly the Christian gospel is marked by liberation. The gospel always gives space; it opens life out. It both proclaims and brings about freedom of a particular kind. It sets people free from guilt, from false ideologies and from conformity to narrow expectations. It offers release from self-justification and it offers us new possibilities for life and action.



The second mark of the gospel is joy. Whenever joy is absent and the church appears to be a kill-joy institution we can be sure that the gospel has been lost.

The third mark of the gospel is hope; that is an assurance about the future based on what Jesus has already done and what has already happened in us as a consequence.

## *Discipleship*

While the gospel is extremely important and too often misunderstood we have to recognise that there are dangers when it stands alone. The greatest danger is what Bonhoeffer referred to as “cheap grace”. It can appear as if God in Christ does everything and we need do nothing. God’s grace is all-sufficient.

**S**o it is important to recognise that Jesus calls us all to be disciples and to disciple other people. Brian Medway has reminded us that the church is not very good at responding to the great commission.

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you.”*

We may even find it hard to be disciples ourselves. It is a difficult calling, but unless we take the command seriously we are in danger of falling into cheap grace, living as though we are still part of the world and the gospel we have heard has made no difference.

It is time for the church in all its divisions to recognise that fulfilling the Commission is indeed the primary task of the church and therefore deserves our most urgent attention and action.

*Gordon Dicker is a former Moderator of the UCA NSW Synod*

# PNEUMA: praying for winds of change

**BRIAN HILL** on evangelicals maintaining their witness in Australia's largest state

I've been asked to explain the appearance in the West of a life form called PNEUMA. Some suspect the name refers to a branch of the cat family, others wonder if it has links with inflated tyres. Still others show off their knowledge of Greek by pointing out that "pneuma" is a word meaning breath, wind, or spirit. That's close!

Immediately after the equivocal National Assembly of the UCA in 2006, a large interstate group of observers who had gathered in Brisbane resolved to create the ACC. As the West Australian delegates to this gathering returned to their own state, the question in their minds was, "What form should our continuing evangelical witness in the WA synod take now?"

At a meeting to wind down the local branches of the Reforming Alliance and EMU, it was noted that only a small number of churches in WA were in a position to identify corporately with the Confessing movement at this stage. Some have, but in general, WA Evangelicals are scattered through theologically mixed congregations.

The gathering felt that engagement in internal political debate should not be our immediate priority, but rather the creation of a network offering pastoral support to evangelical members of the UCA, while seeking to encourage and train each other in holistic evangelistic ministry. We did, however, encourage our members to take advantage of ACC's provisions for individual membership so that they could keep in touch with, and support, the national agenda. A number have done so.

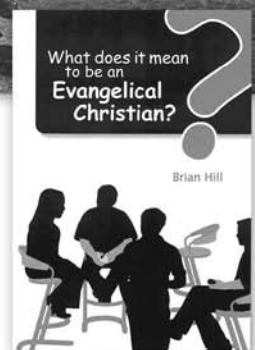
We also chose to sail under the name PNEUMA, because it not only picked up the biblical use of the word to refer to the Holy Spirit, but it could be regarded as an acronym for "Pastoral Network of Evangelicals Uniting in Mission Action." Our quarterly newsletter is appropriately called "Winds of Change" and we have published a booklet on "What does it mean to be an Evangelical?" In 2008, the WA Synod agreed to list PNEUMA as one of its recognised action groups or networks.

Our charter notes that "from its founding Basis of Union to its present range of compassionate ministries and concern for social justice, the Uniting Church in Australia has many things going for it. We also believe, however, that the steep decline in its membership is due

partly to theological drift from that Basis, and partly to a weakened commitment to the lordship of the Christ to whom the Scriptures reliably attest, and to evangelism as central to a holistic Gospel."

Over the four years of our existence, we have sought to strengthen links between city and country congregations of like mind, build good relationships with our migrant and indigenous congregations, teach the core biblical

*continued page 14*



**From top: CampFIRE group listening to an exposition. CampFIRE families relaxing between sessions. PNEUMA booklet, can be ordered from [info@pneuma.unitingchurch.org.au](mailto:info@pneuma.unitingchurch.org.au)**

# UCA church plant

IAN CLARKSON tells the story of ACC's youngest member

**T**he Branches was formed in 1992 with a small band of believers and co-workers starting out to plant a church. Commissioned by Tea Tree Gully Uniting (SA) where we had been members and leaders, *The Branches* was at first unrecognised by Presbytery but later received as “a new model” congregation. Our aim was to help folk re-access church in its Biblical simplicity. That has happened. Over the years, young families, old and young, alone or lonely, educated or not, churched and unchurched, various skin colours, diversities of all sorts—precious individuals, have come back into the Body of Christ. Some have remained and become core leaders for future ministry, and others have been bridged back to ministry within other churches.

We've been variously described, most commonly: “this is real” and “I look forward to Sundays—it's a taste of reality”—all comments from men. The last from a GMH assembly worker who came to Christ through *The Branches* community and read the whole Bible, over a couple of years, during the ninety seconds break before the next Commodore rolled up to have its fender fitted! The Bible is our food, guide and life-giving signpost. We won't give it up for anything!

Much of *The Branches* ministry has been beyond itself. From day one we have wanted to stimulate the re-seeding of Christian faith and congregations where they have receded. Our people helped stir interest in another suburban church that then led to them planting a separate

congregation. For several years we ran a branch congregation in an old suburb with a lot of boarding houses, while another like-minded group has linked with us. Just this week a couple did a week of pastoral visiting in an unpastored country church.

We value ACC and HopeNet membership. They give solidarity with witnessing Bible-nourished congregations, and a common voice on community and national issues that affect the wellbeing of society. We are connected through ministry visits and plan to develop further with return visits, training and encouragement, stay-overs and fresh evangelism missions.

Denominational connection is pragmatic, as it should be, one medium for sharing ministry ideas and modelling church planting ideas to others. Being independent with funding, property and ministry brings out the best in a denominational relationship, especially in a day where resources and relationships connect across many movements and churches.

So what distinctive ideas have shaped us, given us continuity and, I hope, some Kingdom usefulness?

We don't own any property and our leadership is grassroots and bi-vocational. That is, leadership emerges from within the fellowship and has a measure of self-support.

Our goal is the formation of Christ in His people. We call it “Christomorphia”. This comes from an amazing promise, the work of the New Covenant. We are to take seriously the disciplines of Christ's grace—especially forgotten ones like: talk we wouldn't say to a person's face. Zero tolerance here. This is hard to follow but has been a

from page 13

truths, and share Jesus with our neighbours by word and deed. Gatherings to further these aims have included an annual “PNEUMA in the city” event to share stories of effective church mission; one or two gatherings a year of sympathetic ministers, pastors, theological students and partners around a meal; and “CampFIRE.”

**C**ampFIRE occurs annually over a long-weekend. Taking over hotel accommodation and the community camping ground—well, the whole town actually, since we outnumber the residents!—we draw families from city and country to a feast of fellowship and teaching. The country town of Lake Yealering

in the south-east of the State stands at the head-waters of the Avon River, which flows over 250km to Perth. We like the symbolism of this, and the encouragement CampFIRE gives to many folk in small, isolated rural churches, as well as the increasing number of city-sid-

ers who make the journey. Numbers have built to about 140 persons at the last CampFIRE (Sept. 2010. See [www.wa.uca.org.au/pneuma/home/campfire](http://www.wa.uca.org.au/pneuma/home/campfire)).

We have also endorsed and publicised projects in evangelism training and desert spirituality spearheaded by Steering Group member, Rev. Dr Ian Robinson ([www.talltrees.org.au](http://www.talltrees.org.au)), and we have sought to promote mentoring relationships with young ministers and leaders. Our Steering Group is approximately half-and-half ministers and lay leaders, and is currently chaired by Rev. Mike Fawcett from Bicton UC. Rev. Mark Illingworth manages our website, at [www.wa.uca.org.au/pneuma](http://www.wa.uca.org.au/pneuma)

Where to next? We're conscious that many WA churches have lapsed into maintenance mode. Our aim is to get the churches back into mission mode, and we cherish the opportunity of contact with increasing numbers of youth and young adults at CampFIRE whom we see as the evangelical leaders of the future.

So PNEUMA is neither a feral cat nor a new movement. It is a positive local response to the decline and malaise of the UCA in this particular neck of the woods. Pray for us.



**Branches members flank their church sign**

huge strength and saved us from unnecessary troubles. The Bible speaks very clearly and strongly about speech as an instrument that can bless, or curse. We seek to practice a discipline that excludes gossip, or any comment that would bring down the dignity of another in the eyes of those with whom we are talking. We also accept the discipline of not using the Name of God to strengthen or endorse what we say, even when we think we are speaking in harmony with His will. We should leave such judgments to be made by our hearers instead.

**C**hildren learn best from watching adults worship, listening sincerely to the Word and hearing parents speak well of everyone else in the fellowship. They learn by rote, example and from other adults taking an interest in them. Law points to grace. Our children are taught the Ten Commandments plus selected texts and creeds. The “Jesus files” is a special children’s segment with different folk dramatising Bible narrative from the standpoint of a non-Bible character who revisits across the centuries.

We try to be clear thinking, rejecting un-evidenced hearsay and avoiding over-trusting our hunches. We seek to exercise sound minds, so important for many things including faith sharing. No jumping to conclusions about persons or issues in the church—thus prejudice is rejected. We seek to be critical of our own intuitions and accept the labour of assessing evidence.

We own no property and while this isn’t a doctrinal thing, it has served us well. At one stage we won the cleaning contract on the council hall so were paid to clean up our own mess.

Leadership is functional before it is official. An insight gained from Icthus in UK was the value of under-fifty membership allowing for governance which suits a concrete rather than abstract culture. This has worked for us.

Baptism is administered in various forms for both

adults and infants. We hold to unity in primaries and freedom in secondaries. The creeds disregard such things as baptisms, church government, and style of church meetings, so we seek to make applications into our daily lives from the primary doctrines of Scripture and respect the varying traditions expressed in our church.

The grace of God is the context of life. Thus, God delights in voluntary response. This means that the organisation of a church is different from clubs, societies or associations, in that the response to its laws and its Head, is a response of the heart evoked by the love of God. The actions of the people in the church are a voluntary response to this grace. This means that we must wait for God to work in His people, accepting His pattern of gifts and refuse to be complaining, or impatient with each other.

The Communion of Saints: We reject distinctions based on worldly status, encouraging in our people, young and old, a resistance to being awed by those roles and images presenting pseudo-values of humanhood. The Communion of Saints, based in the call of Christ, is the high status of human worth.

Because the Word is Spirit-empowered, and is played out through all members, the priesthood of believers, the Sunday service besides a sermon includes “body-building” (building up the body of the church) where members speak the Word, prepared (preferable) or spontaneous. Plus The Lord’s Table objectifying the Word amongst us and celebrated with joy every Sunday. Children are included because learning is by participation.

Amidst a “now-instant” culture we keep our 4D glasses handy to perceive that which lasts, shared with those called through all generations, living both on earth and in heaven. Christ defines everything for us and gives us all we need and all that we need to know. We love Him and wait to enjoy His Kingdom to the fullest.

*Ian Clarkson is the founding pastor of the Branches which continues today with an oversight team with Jamie Mattner as pastor.*

# Integral Mission

Margaret Macmillan on ‘joined up’ Christianity

**I**n 2004 the Micah Challenge made a declaration about Integral Mission:  
*Integral mission or holistic transformation is the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God that sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word we have nothing to bring to the world .... As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.*

While the term “integral mission” may be new the concept is not. Some people argue that the term is a modern attempt to use words that do not suffer from the negative associations that have clustered around older terminology like “holistic/wholistic” mission or “transformational development”. Others say it represents a real shift in understanding of what mission truly is.

David Bosch, a leading writer on the theory of mission, states: “Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God ... Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.” Mission should be God-centred and the church is God’s instrument, sent into the world to demonstrate and work for what God is doing in the world. The good news that Jesus taught was the gospel of the kingdom into which mankind, because of Jesus’ death, and resurrection, is invited to enter. The gospel of the kingdom is linked to the mission of God that is to undo the effects of sin, to bring reconciliation between us and God and to extend that reconciliation to all creation.

Vinoth Ramachandra, a Sri Lankan who serves as Secretary for Dialogue & Social Engagement for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students writes : “Integral Mission is a way of calling the church to keep together, in her theology as well as in her practice, what

---

**Those committed to some faith or no faith usually have a world-view and we need to identify and build on it. But as Christians our allegiance is to Christ alone.**

---

the triune God of the biblical narrative always brings together: ‘being’ and ‘doing’, the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘physical’, the ‘individual’ and the ‘social’, ... and so on.” It seems simple—we are to serve people and to tell them about Jesus. But we find it easier to serve people or employ others to, than to tell them about Jesus. When we add words to our actions we risk being rejected or laughed at. Over time this can make us reluctant to talk about Jesus at all, and certainly words about Christ need to be offered with Christian attitudes and clothed with Christian deeds. However, what leads to a lack of verbal proclamation is not the failure to combine word and deed but spiritual decay. When we have become spiritually listless the first thing to go is any attempt to talk about Jesus Christ. If we love Jesus and keep our hearts warm and in tune with God, compassionate deeds and bold words will issue naturally and deliberately.

**T**his pattern can be broadened from the individual to the congregation and, dare we say it, to the denomination. That would mean changes:

- we would see the congregation as the “mission unit”;
- we would encourage local congregations to be engaged in holistic ministry in their communities and even further afield;
- we would go beyond talking about “being a mission-shaped church”, with emphasis on “rejuvenating ... historic sites” and “Surprising people through what we hope will be a new generation of inspiring church buildings”;
- we would support shrinking congregations and not see our future only in our schools, hospitals and agencies;
- we would work on “rejoining word and deed” as some agencies and congregations did in the 1980’s.

Congregations must understand the community in which they live. Paul saw an inscription on an altar in Athens, recognised the belief in an ‘unknown god’ and went from there (Acts 17). Over the centuries Christian missionaries have found that the groups among whom they were ministering had some concepts that could be a starting point for their understanding the gospel. In our own country, missionaries found common ground with indigenous people, built on that and then moved to the Christian distinctives. As missionary Lesslie Newbigin says, in writing about contextualisation, “the truth about the gospel must be announced in a way that makes sense to the hearer” and yet at the same time it must “not be a product shaped by the mind of the hearer”. In talking with Muslims, we can start with a belief in monotheism and the concept that followers represent their god in the world; but a gap develops as we talk of God the Father,





**Peacemaking in Bougainville PNG, a conflict resolution program supported by Unitingworld.**

God the incarnate Son, and God the Holy Spirit who lovingly include humanity in their communal life.

There are limits to dialogue (Hebrews 12). Those committed to some faith or no faith usually have a world-view and we need to identify and build on it. But as Christians our allegiance is to Christ alone. While dialogue is a process in which we should engage, that dialogue will not be sincere if Christians do not honestly declare beliefs that will not be acceptable to others. Neither side expects to change its stance; the purpose is not conversion but may be to convey historical facts, to explain differences in beliefs or to promote harmony. Dialogue is not the same as proclaiming the gospel—which we have been commanded to do. Some in leadership in our denomination have commended congregations which reach out in witness and service to spread the gospel and call people to faith in Christ if they are people of no faith but decry seeking to convert Jews or targeting other faith communities. They claim it is “disrespectful” but is it really that or do they just not believe the exclusiveness of the claims of Christ?

**O**ur theology of mission should be drawn from the whole of the Bible. In the Old Testament we see God so passionately concerned with social issues that in the laws he gave and through the prophets he sent, he addressed issues like “political arrogance and abuse; economic exploitation; judicial corruption; the suffering of the poor and the oppressed; the evils of brutality and bloodshed; ... more than any other issue except idolatry”. And the psalmists cry out to the God they know cares deeply about such things. God is committed to every dimension of human life and opposed to all that spoils human well-being.

The gospels show Jesus demonstrating this in his ministry of healing and confirming it in his teaching. In his death he made it possible for the whole of creation to

be redeemed. God’s mission is that sin should be punished and sinners forgiven; evil should be defeated and humanity liberated; death should be destroyed; people should be reconciled to one another and to God; and creation itself should be restored. These all lead to the cross of Christ.

The cross is central to every aspect of holistic mission. It is the foundation of both our evangelism and our social engagement because in all forms of Christian mission we are confronting the power of evil and the kingdom of Satan in the name and power of the crucified and risen Christ.

There is a personal aspect to one’s salvation, but this is only part of the redemptive mission of Christ which is, as N. T. Wright, a leading New Testament scholar and research professor at St Andrews University writes, “putting the world back to rights”.

The church is invited and empowered to bear witness to the “breaking in” reign of God that started with the cross. The church does this in many ways: through proclamation of the risen Christ; through demonstration of ‘kingdom’ life within the community of God’s people; and through working to set right what sin has done.

The concept of integral mission therefore challenges the whole church and not just those who feel called to work with or for the poor. It calls us to consider not only what we do—our programs or projects—as what we are called to be, as communities of God’s people. It is basically an issue of the integrity of the church’s life or consistency between what the church is and what it proclaims.

Mission is a divine initiative not a human enterprise. Referring to Matthew 28:18-20, missionary writer Lesslie Newbigin’s words are true for the whole church, each part and each individual member:

*... the only thing that can make the gospel credible, the only thing that makes it possible to believe that the ultimate authority over the whole universe resides in a man nailed to the cross, is a company of people who live in the biblical story so that they know it as their own story and as the clue to the whole human story.*

## PRAYER

# Keeping the fire burning

*That is why I would remind you to stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you (2 Timothy 1:6 AMP).*

Brian and I used to be farmers, and before winter Brian would go out to the old wood heap out the back of our house to check to see how much wood was still left from the winter before.

Out he would go to the plantation of sugar gums on our farm, to find the old dead trees to cut up for our fire for the winter. Using the old Fordson Major tractor and saw bench, he would cut up and bring home a large supply of wood, of all sorts of shapes and sizes, to store in the old rain water tank out the back of our house.

Our fire was kept going all winter and so our house became all nice and warm. When the fire burnt down low, more wood was put on, and the fire stoked up, and again the flames would lick the wood.

If you feel as though you are running on empty and the embers of your faith and passion for God is dying down, do as God instructs in 2 Timothy, stoke this fire within by prayer, talking to Him, enjoying time with Him, meditating on scripture & worship.

*Mandy Scott*

“PrayerNet” The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church in Australia  
[prayernet@confessingcongregations.com](mailto:prayernet@confessingcongregations.com)

*From page 20*

Geoffrey Rush, who helps the King with his debilitating stammering and his growing public speaking role. According to most reports I have seen the film is quite accurate with the period setting and overall theme, but there is always literary license, though in my opinion less than in the 1997 film *Titanic*.



**confessingcongregations.com has a gallery of church signs belonging to member churches of ACC. Take a browse and remember to pray for other members of ACC in member churches and single members across Australia**

## Following the pattern and influencing the world

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity (Col 4: 2-5 NIV).*

The Christians in the early church were devoted and committed to following the pattern of prayer set down by the Son and they and their prayers influenced the world.

Prayer is the primary source of fellowship with God and for experiencing His power and presence in our lives, and yet prayer and devotion to our Lord has been neglected, and our church is in spiritual poverty.

Let us be committed to prayer, following the pattern set before us, with burdened hearts for our church, on knees bent in prayer, and prayer will become a powerful weapon to influence and transform that which is broken and so in need of restoration.

*Mandy Scott*

I thought it was prudent to warn people of the use of some strong swearing especially in one scene as the King learns to enunciate what can only be described as base vernacular.

There are some lovely aspects shown illustrating the common life of the Royal family—how ordinary in many ways they clearly would have

been. We see the young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, and the wonderful Queen Elizabeth, played so well by Helen Bonham Carter. The role of the church is also interesting, demonstrating the implicit and dominant cultural role of the Church of England through the Archbishop of Canterbury.

*Peter Bentley*

# What does a confessing movement do?

Can I say something about a confessing movement which comes in answer to the question, "What is the ACC doing?" As you can see below, there are things that ACC is doing, both nationally and locally. However, the question, "What is the ACC doing?" is actually the wrong question if you or your congregation are members of the ACC.

This is because *you* are the ACC. The ACC is an assembly of congregations and individuals who identify together to make a shared confession of Christ. We sometimes say, "The ACC confesses Christ according to the faith of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the Basis of Union". This confession is not only made in the statements and papers of the National Council and its Commissions. Your personal confession of Christ, and your participation in the collective confession of our assembly, is as important as what happens nation-

ally or at a state level.

It can be very wearing for our leaders to be put on to perform, with the implied threat that if we are not doing enough then you or your congregation will withdraw. Such a state of affairs does not come within a bull's roar of what a confessing movement really is.

A true confessing movement is a ground-swell people movement, in which 'the full number of those who (believe are) of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32).

One very helpful way of participating in the ACC is to take responsibility for keeping yourself informed so that instead of being the person who asks, "What is the ACC doing?" you are the person who can answer that question when someone else asks it.

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the love of the Father, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

*Rev. Rod James SA ACC Movement*

## This is the ACC

### *Who we are*

Within the Uniting Church context of a very broad range of theology and practice, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations is a nationwide body of congregations and individuals whose vision is confessing the Lord Jesus Christ, proclaiming the truth, renewing the church.

### *Our goals include*

- Encouraging the confession of Christ according to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as that faith is described in the UCA's Basis of Union.
- Providing resources, seminars and conferences to build up believers, develop their gifts, and equip them for life, mission and works of service.
- Encouraging Christian believers in earnest prayer through our Prayer Network.
- Encouraging younger members of the Uniting Church in their faith and participation.

- Communicating about current events and issues through our website, our national magazine *ACCatalyst* and local newsletters.

### *What does ACC do to help you?*

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers

- to grow in their faith and be active in prayer, worship and fellowship
- to share their faith and respond to current issues in the church and the world
- to develop their congregations as vibrant expressions of the Good News.
- to experience God's Word in action through healing broken lives and reconciling relationships.

We offer printed, audio, and audio/visual resources on a wide range of topics.

For further information contact *accoffice@confessingcongregations.com*

## What happens next:

- March 7-8: ACC National Council Meeting (and Commissions and Board representatives) at the Healing Centre, Newtown, Sydney.

If you have any matters for the attention of the National Council please send to the ACC Office. Thank you.

- April 2: NSW ACC Movement AGM: Sutherland
  - April 16: Wesley Institute Annual Seminar. Speaker: Dr Craig Keener, Duke University. "Encountering the Historical Jesus of the Gospels" (This is also part of a course Dr Keener is teaching 14-16 April 2011). Venue: Drummoyne, Sydney.
  - August 29-31: Oxygen 11, the First National Conference for Pastors and Leaders, in Redfern, Sydney. Speaker: John Piper (ACC has been invited to join this event organised by the Katoomba Christian Convention) [www.kcc.org.au/Piper](http://www.kcc.org.au/Piper)
  - September 8-10, 2011: ACC National Conference, at Brimbank (Anglican Church, East Keilor) in Melbourne.
- The conference commences on Thursday 8 September 2011 and concludes with lunch on Saturday 10 September.

## Can you consider making a Bequest to the ACC?

It has been wonderful to see the support and hope evidenced for the ACC appeal, and in particular the enthusiasm for a National Director. Some members have indicated that they would like to make a larger contribution to the future work of the ACC, but are not presently able to do this, and thought one way was to provide for the ACC in their will. This is a very helpful suggestion, as people can contribute to the on-going and long-term work of the confessing movement. All you need to do is specify in your will the name of the organisation, and the amount to be provided:

For example, "I give .... to the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Inc. For the general purposes thereof."



Andrew Garfield as Eduardo Saverin and Jesse Eisenberg as Mark Zuckerberg

## Two Oscar chances

### **The Social Network (rated M)**

**T**he *Social Network* has already gathered many awards and is considered by many critics to be the film of the year. If you are not aware what it is about then you are probably not connected to the internet, and are not involved with on-line social networking. With Facebook you allow 'friends', 'friends of friends' (or the whole world) to interact with you by a form of instant messaging, sharing information, photos and basically keeping in touch 24 hours a day, in nearly any country or area in the world. A growing trend with teenagers with internet-enabled phones and mobile Facebook is the tendency to have less sleep as one needs to continually respond to comments on Facebook.

Facebook developed from a website Facemash based at Harvard University in 2003, becoming The Facebook in 2004, and moving quickly to the open Facebook site in 2006. Since the early 'open' phase there has been phenomenal growth reaching 500 million members in March 2010. A point that illustrates the influence of the network was *Time* magazine's naming as Person of the Year for 2010, the key developer and public face of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg (born in 1984). There are now an estimated 600 million members (January 2011). You need to be over 13 years of age and are required to use your real life details (though this is of course reliant on people being honest in their details).

Of course not all members are active or spending substantial time on Facebook, but given it is the number 1

website now (more than Google), it is a social phenomenon in a league of its own. In Australia about 1/3 of people are members, and yes I include myself, though I am far from an active user, and my Facebook photo is when I was a much cuter three year old.

I certainly don't think *The Social Network* is the best film for the last year, as there are some melodramatic and almost amateurish unconvincing scenes, though there are also some very perceptive social comments. I believe one of the reasons for its popularity is that it has touched a nerve in contemporary Western society, and has certainly encouraged wide-ranging social discussion about the nature of friendship and communication and the impact of the new social media. Political and wider social usage is clearly very important as people have analysed the role and influence of Facebook in the last US presidential election and in other countries such as Iran where it has been used by opposition elements.

This film helps one to understand the depth of this social revolution, a network born in seemingly "nerdy computer land", but nurtured in the partying and hedonistic environment of university life, which has seemingly little regard for privacy and gentlemanly conduct. There is also consideration of the legal dimensions which have arisen (and continue with the latest lawsuit) with questions about who contributed to Facebook's birth and development, and continuing questions about privacy arrangements and access, though the responsibility for the latter is clearly placed with individuals.

Essentially I see this film as a drama about human relationships, and what can go wrong. Here is the irony, as the film is a personal face-to-face encounter, and often displays a one-to-one context where you see real emotions and responses. This is intriguing given the lack of social skills that Mark Zuckerberg is shown to have, and the base for Facebook that allows one to show what one wants to show (unless of course someone else is showing something about you). There is a certain amount of public arrogance associated with the portrayal of Zuckerberg, which in itself points toward the clear orientation of Facebook—allowing everyone to have 15 seconds (actually probably less) of fame.

Now, I know you are wondering, yes, ACC does have a Facebook page. You can share news and become a "fan" or as it is now known "like" our page, though of course you have to be a Facebook member first. Fortunately we have some members who are more active Facebookers than myself and help to keep this part going and provide a clear and consistent message of the ministry and love shown by Jesus Christ through the confessing movement.

### **The King's Speech (rated M)**

**G**iven the number of people going to view this film, I thought it would be helpful to make a quick comment. It is a wonderful period setting and illustrates the excellence in historical drama we have almost taken for granted nowadays. For people like myself who grew up in a US-International era in Australia it is an eye-opener to the (last) years of the British Empire before the second world war and the tremendous social change that developed post 1945. For older viewers there will no doubt be elements of nostalgia, and for some people memory of the events such as the abdication of King Edward VIII. There is much debate about some historical elements and the political philosophy of King George VI, who is expertly played by Colin Firth, but this is beside the focus of the film that is about a relationship between two men of very different experiences as the Australian speech therapist Lionel Logue, played by

*Continued page 18*