

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

We call upon you in behalf of those who have neither opportunity nor inclination to speak for themselves, perishing, dying sinners: leave them not in their blood.

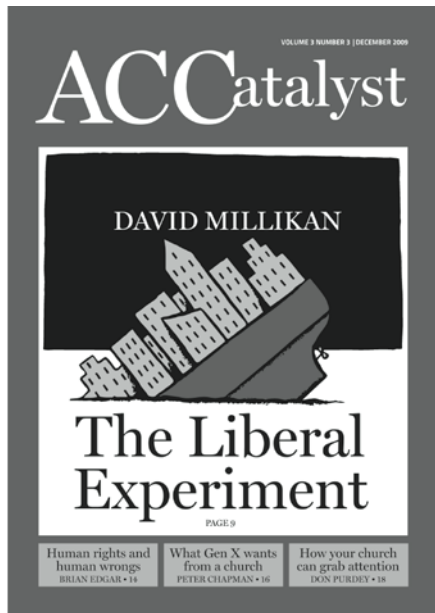
The other 1812 overture

METHODISTS WRITE HOME PAGE 9

My generation is
wrong on marriage
BLAISE JOSEPH • 11

What Aussies
Believe
McCRINDLE • 13

Alternative
Gospel in the USA
GORDON DICKER • 18



Cover illustration bluecrystal/istockphoto.com

EDITORIAL

Good beginnings

In this issue of *ACCatalyst* we have some very old news indeed. As we go to press the 200th anniversary of the first Methodist class meetings in the colony of NSW is fast approaching: by the time of the next *ACCatalyst* the anniversary day, March 6, will have passed.

It is time to thank God for the godly convicts that met to pray and study the Bible in the Rocks in Sydney. That we honour convicts is perhaps uniquely Australian. Our American cousins can give thanks

for those who arrived out of the courage of their convictions, choosing a new land in which to worship God. For ACC and the UCA, however the passage to a new land was out of convictions of a different order.

No matter, God was there in the new land and He could be reached by prayer and in his word. Early on the convicts petitioned London for someone who would preach the gospel and preach sound doctrine. Some things are always needed.

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
acoffice@confessingcongregations.com

Email for *ACCatalyst*:
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, Bay-swater Vic. ISSN 1835 2073

The Birds

I like to water the front lawn early in the morning and I have found myself intrigued by the bird life. Birds appear from nowhere—brightly coloured parrots, black birds with orange beaks, brown birds that hop across the lawn—all kinds of birds. They love those pop-up sprinklers, or rather, they love the water that comes out of them.

They drink and they clean themselves, and they play around in the water having a good time. I find myself watching them through the window. Do they have a calendar so they know to come to my house on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays? Do they do the other side of the road on the alternate days? I know some animals smell water, but being birds, I suppose that they rely on their eyes. They fly around and see the water and are attracted to it.

As I watched this, I thought of Jesus' words in John 7:37-38:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."



Hilary Sandeman

In the first part, it is like we are the birds. We come to Jesus the living water to drink in his life, to be washed clean of our sins and to enjoy

him. There is no other source of life and goodness for our spirits other than Jesus.

But then, the picture changes. Those who believe in Jesus are no longer the birds; we're the sprinklers. Jesus' life flows out through us! And when we let this happen Jesus will use us to give his life and blessing and cleansing and joy to others!

There's a lot of people out there whose spirits are very dry, and who desperately need Jesus' living water. What a privilege it is to be used by him to provide life for others! It's a responsibility, too. If we want to be sprinklers of pure water, we have to keep ourselves clean inside, being careful to repent of our sin and live holy lives. We also need to keep ourselves attached to the tap - who is God our Father. If we move away from him there won't be much water flowing through us.

And before we become sprinklers, we must first be the birds, who come as they are, freely and joyfully to receive. What a wonderful God we serve!!

Robyn



Booragul Uniting Church, who joined ACC in 2011, has now added a striking ACC sign to the front of their church building. Have you thought of adding an ACC sign to your church? ACC Logos can be downloaded from the ACC website.

Going to Jail on purpose

There is something happening in Junee. Habitat for Humanity (NSW), Junee TAFE, MMM Australia and the Junee Correctional centre have joined forces to provide local cost-houses for local people.

Three steel house frames were recently produced in Melbourne by MMM Australia under their steel framing programme which is called BuildABond and is led by Noel Taylor. The frames were built and delivered to Junee by Taylor and a MMM associate Owen Bayliss.

Taylor attends Whittlesea Uniting Church in northern Melbourne, and is a volunteer for the BuildABond program.

Some inmates at Junee Correctional Centre who are doing TAFE certificate courses take part in the Habitat for Humanity project. They have become enthusiastic about working on a project that gives them the opportunity to work on something that will benefit the outside community.

The houses are made inside the Junee Correctional Centre on temporary foundations and then transported to permanent footings on its final site in the town.

Producing the houses in a jail has meant a lot of work for the correc-



Noel Taylor and Owen Bayliss (second and third from the left) help inmates unload steel frames for the Habitat for Humanity project. The inmates' faces have been pixillated

tional centre staff in supervising the project. Each tool and nail needs to be accounted for. A Habitat for Humanity volunteer told *ACCatalyst* that it takes two hours to get the jail workshop ready and pack it up at night. But the jail has been prepared to make this effort to take part in the Habitat for Humanity project.

MMM (Mobile Mission Maintenance) is an international mission organisation which supports Christian ministries by providing building, maintenance and other practical services. Habitat for Humanity builds houses to help low income people, largely overseas but and has built over 100 in Australia.



ctsale / istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

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

Dowrick on Religion

Stephanie Dowrick writes in praise of World Religion Day (*The Age*, 14/1/12). Rejecting the idea that there is “one true faith” she proposes a view of religion that transcends the usual divide between the godly and unbelievers. At the heart of religions she finds the Golden Rule of empathy, common decency, respect and kindness, traits admittedly also shared by humanists.

Feigning objectivity, she privileges Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh religion, who said, “The person who regards all of humankind as equal is religious.” Here she finds hope for the future. “Regarding all humankind as equal and not the same is a primary challenge of 21st-century global living.”

Responses were swift, and predictable. Praised for her “inclusive” approach to “the other,” she was also taken to task for smoothing over the “self-righteous arrogance” of those who claim to uphold “true religion”.

How is it that a self-appointed guru, like Dowrick, is given a public voice when her reasoning is so lazy and her scholarship so flimsy? A commendable focus on our common humanity is blighted by the failure to also look at real differences between religions and humanists on the question of God, human purpose, redemption and hope. It simply will not do, for example, to limit what Jesus says about love and forgiveness to kindness or to ignore the cost of discipleship. One wonders how, in her scheme of things, our flawed humanity and strife-torn world are to be redeemed and perfected simply by following the Golden Rule? And

what are we to make of our place, as tiny specks in a vast cosmic history, if the question of God’s incarnate grace in Christ is thought to be a matter of indifference in the quest for religious harmony?

Tankard Reist lights up the blogosphere

Running a cover feature on anti-porn activist Melinda Tankard Reist was a gutsy move for *Sunday Life*, Fairfax’s Sunday magazine in *The Sun-Herald* and the *Sunday Age*. The article is online at <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life/whos-afraid-of-melinda-tankard-reist-20120110-1psdx.html>

The article written by London-based writer Rachel Hills gives Tankard Reist good space: “My biggest concern is the effect of pornography on young people and children,” says Tankard Reist. “We are socialising boys into a very brutalised version of masculinity. Boys are often looking at porn before they become sexually active, and they’re seeing very callous images of women. What we are allowing to happen to the sexuality of our young people is diabolical.” Sunday Life’s printed version has a readership of 1,149,000 and we can assume a large percentage read the cover story.

Rachel Hills has provided an interesting commentary about the story on her blog; “I was warned before this story was published that in writing it, I would only be granting her ideas credibility. They would have it that the only acceptable story to tell about Tankard Reist was one in which she was “outed” as a villain, one in which her brand of feminism was explicitly declared ‘not real’. But I don’t think

Tankard Reist is a villain. And while I don’t subscribe to her world view, I also think she genuinely believes her work is, as she put it when we spoke, ‘pro-woman and pro-girl’”.

“While *The Sun Herald* went the other way in their attempt to get people to buy the paper and open the magazine, I’d like to give people—or at least the people I was writing the article for—more credit than Tankard Reist’s detractors do. I didn’t want to explicitly say if Melinda was ‘good’ or ‘bad’. I wanted to let people make up their own minds.”

High profile second-wave feminists like Eva Cox were interviewed in the second half of the feature.

It’s this strong line up of critical voices which shows the magazine (and Hills in her blog) saw that running a profile of Tankard Reist is controversial for its readership. *Sunday Life* anticipated a reaction from traditional second wave and libertarian feminists.

They were right. The *SMH* reported the response in “has set Twitter ablaze with outrage for days” (see #mtrsues).

Blogger Dr Jennifer Wilson ignited the reaction, complaining after receiving a letter from Tankard Reist’s lawyers which asked for an apology from Wilson over her online comments that (Tankard Reist) is “deceptive and duplicitous about her religious beliefs”

Wilson also criticised writer Rachel Hills for not questioning Tankard Reist about her religious beliefs in the *Sunday Life* story. Hills responded that yes, she could have asked the question, but surely Tankard Reist’s beliefs as an opponent of abortion were obvious.

Not obvious enough for Wilson.

What came next was surprising to this commentator. Crikey, a website not normally known as a supporter of Christianity, ran a column supporting Tankard Reist's approach of presenting her campaigns (for example urging a boycott of Diva for selling play-boy branded merchandise to young girls) to the public without presenting a specifically Christian argument.

"There's a question as to how Wilson's comments about Tankard Reist can be seen as anything but an ad hominem attack on her character", Crikey's Pure Poison argued. "To claim that Tankard Reist holds particular beliefs because she identifies with any particular Christian sect is a lazy argument and one potentially easily disproved".

The debate ran on and on. Anne Summers, Julia Baird and Mia Freedman all debating whether Tankard Reist is a feminist or not.

Sunday Life should be thanked for giving Tankard Reist such a good run. The debate it sparked about whether a Christian is worth listening to in the public square was very welcome.

(A version of this commentary appeared at biblesociety.org.au)

Hitchens Unhitched

Christopher Hitchens died on 16/12/11 after a very public battle with cancer. Described variously as a "militant humanist", "contrarian", "devout atheist" and "dilettante", he wasn't easily categorised. While criticising Mother Teresa and Jerry Falwell, he also fell out with the socialist Left over his criticisms of the Clinton administration, his advocacy of the US invasion of Iraq and his insistence that a baby is a child from conception. Unlike his brother Peter, who initially shared his views of Christianity, he did not resile from unbelief, writing the best-seller *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* in 2007.

Reflections on his death in *Christianity Today* and *Creedal Christian* (6/12) give pause for thought when churches and reform movements become comfortable with their "ethos".

He understood the implications of Christianity better than most liberal Protestants, exposing the superficiality of those trying to side with him in opposing narrow religion. Far better to give a robust account of orthodox belief than run from the questions posed by atheism!

And when Orwell's "smelly little orthodoxies" began to develop, he was willing to break with the last group

with whom he became identified.

The watered-down faith of many liberals and an increasing number of evangelicals is not a substitute for reaffirming the "splendour of truth" or an excuse for retreating into pious ghettos.

Three is not a crowd

Really, we shouldn't be surprised. Ean Higgins writes that "polyamorists are encouraged by support for same-sex marriage" (*Inquirer, Weekend Australian* 10-11 December). Having entered a float in last year's Mardi Gras, the polyamory community is now committed "to seek recognition and the removal of prejudice against multiple-partner relationships, perhaps legislation to grant them civil unions and even legalised polyamorous marriage". As is to be expected, the aim is to foster a more tolerant and accepting attitude in the

community. Higgins notes that ALP members are reluctant to comment on this possibility.

The argument that same-sex marriage is the start of the "slippery slope" is a threat to the Right, who insist marriage should be between two people who love each other. On the Left it is hard to see how an argument built entirely on equality can avoid extending equality to all forms of "love". Not wise to "let the cat out of the bag" too soon!

Niko Antalfy, a sociologist at Macquarie University who studies and practises polyamory, sums up the pagan thought that underpins this radical redefinition of sexuality. "We now know that sexual monogamy is neither natural nor common and has never been. ... And this brings out human desire, which is multifarious to say the least. Polyamory is the sweet result of modernity." At least we can agree, sadly, with his conclusion!

IAN CLARKSON

Gracious aggression and aggressive grace

Christians, at least in my generation often have difficulty with aggression. The facts are though, that the schoolyard bully unless good behaviour management policies are practised, is best halted by force.

I recently told a bullied youth who claimed as a Christian he was non-violent, to stand up to his tormentors!

Expand the horizon. Boko Harams' (lit. "down with the West") killings in Nigeria may have global implications. Al Quaeda is taking over towns of Southern Yemen. Moslem Brotherhood leaders shaping the new Egypt are stating that sharia and democracy are incompatible. Yes, moderates like Indonesian ex-President Wahid speak against this violence but such are ignored at least or murdered at worst. Our media encourages the acceptance of dhimmi status by Australians—passive acceptance of Islamic hegemony.

Response? Christians, be gracious but be graciously aggressive (check the dictionary) "awake O sleeper-for some have not the knowledge of God", "contend for the faith", "we cannot but speak", "burn with the Spirit".

Jesus worked because His father worked. He was The Activist in His Fathers great enterprise to recapture the earth through offering its repentant rebels a pardon beyond amnesty—just, cleansing and all gracious through His shed blood!

Even notables like Alexander Downer and British PM Cameron in recent speeches are asking the church to be more forward with its mandate. The Queen declared Christ is Lord in her Christmas message.

In Australia, Satan caresses our skin with God's abundant gifts, but tens of millions of Christs body across the world who declare him the Saviour and Judge of the earth, he cuts and tears by the hands of ignorant men.

"Holy Spirit, refire our zeal our energy—set us afresh to tell what has been told us, to honour amongst others the Rock we rest our souls upon." The founders of South Australia laid the new colony before God with the prayer it would evangelise the Southern hemisphere.

Grace is aggressive—it takes offensive action, it attacks passivity, unbelief, hypocrisy and hidden sins. In the Psalmist's words willing Christians arise early, and willingly offer themselves for battle, while the Lord extends His sceptre and rules in the midst of His enemies.

Our Father in heaven

ROSS CARTER continues an *ACCatalyst* series on the Lord's Prayer

"Hallowed be your name" is a phrase that is strange to our ears. "Hallow" is derived from "hallelujah" which means "praise the Lord". So this petition asks God to make his name known so that people in the world will understand his presence among them with awe and reverence.

But what is God's name? When Moses asks God to tell him his name the answer he receives is that "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14).

We could perhaps paraphrase this by saying that God's name is God's presence as God makes himself present to men and women. On the eve of his crucifixion Jesus, according to John's Gospel, says, "Father, glorify your name" (John 12:28). In response to Jesus' petition a voice came from heaven saying "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28). God's name is the personal event of Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection God's name is hallowed.

So when we pray "hallowed be your name" we are acknowledging that the name of God is his Word and presence in Jesus Christ, and that the awesome eventfulness of this name for men and women is shown in the cross and resurrection. We are also acknowledging that only God can make the beauty and glory of his name known.

However in praying this petition we are also praying that the Holy Spirit will give us a mind to hallow God's reality. This means to truly know what we are talking about

when we talk about God. This action of the Holy Spirit is vital for without it the historical record shows that people always try to name God in such a way that he is a tool for our purposes. The point of the petition is that it is only if God acts that his name will be truly hallowed.

Your Kingdom come

According to the Gospel of St Mark Jesus, after being baptised by John, begins his public ministry saying "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). The gospels also report that Jesus told many parables that began with the words "the kingdom of God is like", and then went on to describe a new kind of social order. What do these observations tell us about the kingdom of God?

They tell us that the kingdom is present when time is fulfilled, which means when it has reached its goal. According to the New Testament the goal of time is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. This can only mean that Christ is the fulfillment of time which in turn means that the future of the world is present in the middle of time.

So to pray "your kingdom come" is to pray that humanity may live in fulfilled time, and that this fulfilled time will transform the way we organize our lives. We are praying that the present of future and fulfilled time will infect our time in such a way that human communities are transformed into the kind of con-

crete social order that is evoked by the parables Jesus told.

Your will be done on Earth as in Heaven.

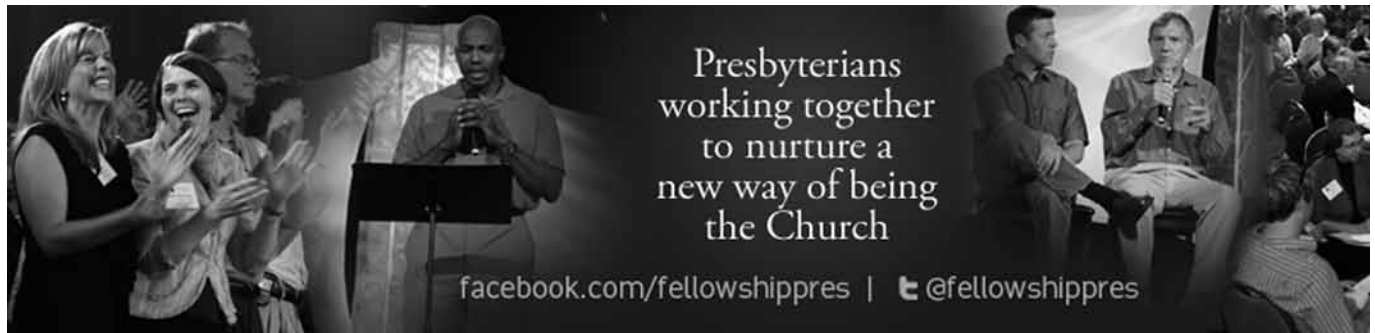
"It's the will of God—we must learn to live with it." How many times have you heard somebody say something like that, and say it in the face of the most appalling circumstances – the death of a young child from cancer or the deaths of thousands of people in an earthquake?

When we pray "your will be done" does that mean accepting whatever happens as God's will? Is this what Jesus had to learn in the Garden of Gethsemane—to become resigned to his fate when he prayed, "Father let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not my will but yours be done"? No, Jesus does not teach us to submit ourselves to whatever events occur as if they were our ordained fate. The gospels recount that Jesus healed the sick and the broken wherever he encountered them, and that he did this because this was the will of God for people.

So, then, when we pray "your will be done" this is not a prayer of resignation, not a pious prayer that accepts evil as if it were God's purpose. It is, rather, a combative prayer against these things. To pray "your will be done" is to pray that Jesus Christ, who is God's will and purpose for people, may proclaim himself to us in such a way that his healing love and peaceableness takes root in our human communities.



US Presbyterians seek shelter



A new confessing movement needs to get on twitter right away

Conservative Presbyterians are considering their future in the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), following changes in the church's rules that allow presbyteries to appoint gay ministers.

After a 2011 that saw many disaffected congregations flee the PCUSA due to theological conflicts, 2012 may unfold into an ever-widening exodus, as more churches seek dismissal and join other denominations.

"Many departing churches have cited the 2011 approval of Amendment 10A and the passage of the new Form of Government (nFOG) as symptoms of a more serious underlying problem in the denomination: variant views of the authority of Scripture", reports *The Layman online*—the main PCUSA conservative website.

"Amendment 10A deleted the explicit 'fidelity/chastity' requirement from the constitutional ordination standard, and now allows the PCUSA to ordain of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people as deacons, elders and pastors. The new Form of Government has raised concerns of a more "top-down" PCUSA bureaucracy and a universalistic theology."

Some congregations have left for existing denominations like the Presbyterian Church of America (similar to the Presbyterian Church of Australia) or the more moderate Evangelical Presbyterian Church that allows women ministers.

But an ACC-like group has developed as well. Approximately 2,150 Presbyterians representing more than 500 congregations from

49 states gathered for *The Fellowship of Presbyterians Covenanting Conference* in Orlando, Florida. The three-day conference (January 18-20) highlighted the Fellowship's commitment to offering support and structure for congregations both in the PCUSA and those who leave.

During the Conference, the Fellowship launched a new Reformed body, called The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO). ECO is a denominational entity under the umbrella of The Fellowship of Presbyterians that is committed to growing and planting flourishing churches and nurturing leaders.

The distinctives of ECO include an emphasis on connecting leaders in accountable relationships, peer review systems for churches, leadership training, and a flatter polity structure than the PCUSA.

The Fellowship offers three different options for affiliation so congregations can pursue what best honors their ministry context. The options are:

- Affiliate with the Fellowship as a ministry association (involves no change in status with the PCUSA);
- Pursue a union membership with the PCUSA and ECO;
- and join ECO as full members (requiring dismissal from the PCUSA).

A graphic on the ECO website explains their choice of name:

Evangelical: advance the gospel of Christ, plant missional communities, develop gospel-centred leaders.

Covenant: connect leaders in accountable relationships, encourage collaboration, minister out of God's unrelenting grace and covenant with his people.

Order: Commit to a shared way of life together, unite around a shared theological core, gather regularly to encourage discipleship

Of Presbyterians: stand on our Reformed heritage, affirm education and the life of the mind, serve our communities and the world.

This DNA shares an awful lot of chromosomes with the ACC.

In a late breaking development a collection of 24 Presbyterians, most of whom are middle-level bureaucrats, have dispatched a "Letter of Reconciliation" to Gradye Parsons, stated clerk for the Office of the General Assembly of the PCUSA and Jim Singleton, president of the Fellowship of Presbyterians.

The Layman reports that the letter pleads for a middle-of-the-road compromise in the midst of what has become a rapidly fracturing denomination.

The letter's emailed press release, signed by Paul Watermulder, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Burlingame, Calif., said that those who signed the letter were "intent first on urging our General Assembly leadership to become bridge-builders with those churches and leaders who out of conscience have become disaffected from our denomination."

"The second intent was to urge all those who are talking about leaving or distancing themselves from the PCUSA to slow down."

The letter states, "A significant number of PCUSA congregations have entered into a period of discernment, prayerfully considering how they can remain part of the PCUSA while also maintaining theological integrity."

1812: Methodism comes to Australia

An extract from James Colwell, The Illustrated History of Methodism. Australia 1812 to 1855; New South Wales and Polynesia 1856 to 1902. Sydney: William Brooks and Co., 1904.

At Wesley's last Conference in 1790, a Committee of nine members, was appointed to take charge world mission. Between 1803 and 1804 Wesleyan ministers in London formed an Committee of Finance and Advice. In 1799 the Committee resolved to take the West Indies under its care. During this period Auxiliary Missionary Societies began to be formed throughout the Church, and Colwell describes "a wave of Missionary zeal which swept before it all obstacles"...

From a far off land, then but little known and only thought of as a convenient place in which to try a doubtful experiment, came the following pathetic appeal from a pious layman, Mr. Thos. Bowden, who had made his home in Sydney;
 "Sydney, New South Wales, July 20th, 1812.

"On the 28th we got safely into this Port, which is a most astonishingly beautiful, romantic, capacious, and commodious harbour, of which I need say but little, several authors having done this better than I can do..... Of Methodists, we have here in Society the following persons: in Sydney, Mr. John H. who leads a Class in his own house, consisting of Mr. H., Mrs. B., and Mrs. I., and three of the senior girls in the school. Mr. B. has also a class in his house, consisting of Mr. H., I. F., T. J., husband of the above, and a soldier or two of the 75th Regiment. Our meetings are generally very comfortable and profitable. At Windsor, we have a class under the care of Mr. E., consisting of six. Mr. E. is a pious, sensible young man . . . from Ireland, where he was con-verted... He was bred to the bar; and being a humble, affectionate disposition, and zealous in the cause of God, I doubt not . . . would make a useful man among us. He has been employed for some months past in teaching school, and he goes some miles into the country on Sunday, where he reads the Church Liturgy, and expounds or preaches to the settlers, several of whom are thankful for his labours. This is a very recent undertaking only of a few weeks, so that we can speak but very little of its success.

"March 6th, 1812, we held our first Class Meeting, and it has continued ever since.

"April 3rd.-Our friends at Windsor came down, and we held a Lovefeast, which was a most blessed season. God

was eminently present, and gave us such a meek, humble, simple loving spirit, that the place was a little heaven, and each thought himself the most unworthy of so great a blessing. We had been con-sulting on the most effectual means of procuring the Gospel among us by means of itinerant preaching. We had justly concluded that, although we have a few worthy Clergymen here, yet till we see more labourers going forth in the spirit of their work, with pure, disinterested principles, labouring only to win souls to Christ, we cannot reasonably hope that God will make bare His arm, and display His saving power.

"We therefore determined to address our Missionary Committee, and to solicit their aid in sending us some Ministers whom God has anointed for so great a work'. Of such men we doubt not our native country has several, whose desire is only to spend and to be spent in the work of saving souls... One of the most powerful arguments we can urge is, here are thousands of souls perishing for lack of knowledge, both in high and low life. Iniquity exceedingly abounds; and in many cases the only difference between the one arid the other is that which avarice or oppression has made... The statement made will show that abundance of work might be found for one or two Missionaries; and could two be obtained, it would be a very great advantage, as they could act in concert, strengthen each other's hands in God, and their work would be far pleasanter. As for their support I am allowed to state that could they be sent out to us with a good allowance of books, wearing apparel, furniture for a house apiece, we would be answerable for the rest. I am sure Mr. Marsden would be glad to see the different settlements provided, and especially if we proceed in the primitive way of Methodism; not in hostility against the Church, but rather in unison with it; not so much to make a party distinct from the Church, as to save souls in the Church. Of course, the Preacher should not be radically a Dissenter; if possible, one attached to the Establishment, as Mr. Wesley, Dr Clarke, and most of our primitive Preachers were.

"I am, etc,"

The Committee's response to this appeal is found in the Conference Minutes of 1814, wherein it is set forth:-

N. S. Wales: Two to be sent by the Committee. Montreal: Samuel Leigh if wanted.

But before effect could be given to this determination the Committee received the following official communication:-

"To the Preachers and Members of the Committee of the Methodist Missionary Society

"Reverend Fathers,

COVER

“By the good providence of our God, we have been brought under various circumstances from our native land, to this very distant country, and here, in all probability, most of us who now address you, will be called to finish our earthly course.

“In the land which gave us birth, we enjoyed the privileges of the glorious gospel, and in our union with the Methodists we had access to those blessed means of grace which are the glory of that people. Here, we may truly say, ‘the people sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death;’ around us on every hand, we see ignorance and profanity greatly abounding. Sin, and its consequent misery, like an overwhelming deluge, overflows the land. We cannot but feel for our fellow-creatures, degenerated, and depraved. We feel for ourselves as situated amongst them. We feel for our children, the offspring of our bowels, whom we may leave behind us when God shall be pleased to call us hence. To our God we make our complaint, and look for help; and under Him, Fathers, to you, as the instruments of bringing us from darkness to His marvellous light. To you our eyes are naturally turned, and that you may the better judge how to assist us, we beg leave to lay before you the state of this country, and of our circum-stances. There are probably 20,000 souls in this Colony, natives of the British Isles, and their descendants. From the description of people sent hither, much good cannot be expected. The higher ranks of those who were formerly con-victs, are, in general, either solely occupied in amassing wealth, or rioting in sensuality. The lower orders are indeed the filth and offscouring of the earth, in point of wickedness Long accustomed to idleness and iniquity of every kind, here they indulge their vicious inclinations without a blush. Drunkenness, adultery, Sabbath-breaking, and blasphemy, are no longer considered even as indecencies. All those ties of moral order, and feelings of decency, which bind society together, are not only relaxed, but almost extinct. This is the general character of the convicts, high and low; and, excepting the civil and military departments of the Government, there is no other difference than that which wealth naturally creates, in the means it affords for greater indulgence in vice. The rising generation are very numerous, and, in general, pretty well supplied with the means of instruction, schools having been established in the principal towns and villages. But unfortunately the depraved morals of the parents have an unhappy influence over the children. The advantages of education are not sufficiently prized by the parents; hence the children are greatly neglected.

“The present Governor of the Colony is a respectable man; mild, moral, and attentive to the forms of religion. He encourages every attempt to reclaim or improve the people, and affords great assistance towards establishing schools. In a word, he is all that can be expected in a Governor; and we are certain, he would not discountenance further efforts to enlighten the people.

“We have here four Chaplains sent out from England with handsome salaries. The Rev. Samuel Marsden, principal Chaplain, resident at Parramatta, has been in the Colony many years. Mr. M. is a man of considerable talents, and if we were not to form a separate, independent Church, we have reason to believe, he would afford us as much countenance as could be reasonably expected, in

“We call upon you in behalf of those who have neither opportunity nor inclination to speak for themselves, perishing, dying sinners: leave them not in their blood.”

Sydney's Methodist class meetings plead for London to send a preacher

Wesley Mission celebrations

The start of Wesley Mission Sydney bicentennial celebrations includes a senior staff meeting and evening of prayer, on 6 March 2012, in the Wesley Church.

This date marks the first meeting of Methodists on 6 March 1812. A small group of freedmen and convicts formed the early Methodist work and met in the Rocks area of Sydney and the Hawkesbury. That first meeting was called a class meeting, an integral part of Methodism in its early days, focusing people on meeting for prayer and mutual support.

From that small meeting in March 1812 the work grew and a letter was sent to the Methodist headquarters in London asking for a preacher to come. Samuel Leigh arrived in the then colony in 1815.

To mark this important three-year period, Wesley Mission, which cherishes the Methodist tradition within the Uniting Church, is highlighting the significance of these three years in celebrations throughout 2012-2015. Faithful to its early beginnings, Wesley Mission has retained a clear Christian focus, reliant on prayer, and as a major provider of welfare seeking to be a blessing to this nation.

any attempts to improve the morals of the people. The Rev. Wm. Cowper, second Chaplain, resident at Sydney, is a zealous man, and endeavours to do good to the people. The Rev. Robert Cartwright, third Chaplain, resident at Windsor, has been but a short time amongst us. The Rev. Henry Fulton, fourth Chaplain, very recently appointed. With respect to them all, from their characters, we have full reason to conclude that they would at least approve of farther exertions being made among us, provided these exertions did not imply an opposition to the Established Church. There are some Calvinist Dissenters' Missionaries that were some years since sent by the London Missionary Society to Otaheita, and the South

COVER

Sea Islands. Having been forced to leave the Islands, they came to this Colony, and many of them have settled here in trade and business.

"This country, in point of natural and political improvement, is far beyond what is generally conceived at home. The policy of the present Government is just, mild, humane, and encouraging; the climate uncommonly fine and healthy, and peculiarly favourable to an English constitution; the country is beautiful, exceedingly fertile, and intersected with capital roads, the necessaries and luxuries of life abundant and easy to be obtained, and the mode of living, and social habits, nearly the same as in England.

"Sydney, the principal town and seat of Government, is populous and extensive; nearly half the inhabitants of the Colony live there; and there a Preacher would find much to do. Parramatta, a populous village, is situated 16 miles up the country from Sydney, nearly in the centre of the Colony. Within from 5 to 10 miles of Parramatta, on every side are the following detached settlements (in each of which are many families), namely, Liverpool, Prospect, Concord, Baulkham Hills, Castle Hill, and Kissing Point; each of these may become stations of which Parramatta would be the centre. Twenty miles inland from Parramatta lies the populous village of Windsor, in the centre of a tract of 50 miles of a fine agricultural country, on the banks of the Hawkesbury River. The tract is very populous, and settled by farmers; and here there would be abundance of employment from district to district. Sydney town would be the first and principal place, then Parramatta, in the centre of the settlements around it, and, lastly, Windsor, and the Hawkesbury country.

"Blessed be God, notwithstanding the general depravity, there are a few endeavouring to escape the overflowing of iniquity, and to serve the Lord in simplicity and godly fear. We have formed two Classes in Sydney, and one at Windsor. Our members now are 19 in Class, besides occasional attendants, and by God's blessing we look for an increase. At first there was only one family. There are numbers who, from some remains of former impressions, and many other causes, would join us heartily if we were a settled people, and had a pious, upright man among us to preach to, and watch over us. Most of us have been but a short time in the country. We are, however, endeavouring to do as much as we can in the way of prayer meetings, etc.

"Thus circumstanced and in such a country, your children begotten by you in Christ, call upon you, Reverend Fathers, for help. Send us your aid. We doubt not that you will think of the offspring of your labours, your tears, your prayers. Send a faithful servant of the Lord to us; surely there are many willing, yea, desirous to succour the disciples of our common Lord, to proclaim His salvation to perishing sinners even in this distant land. Find out one such, and send him among us: Deny us not; our hearts, our expectations are turned to you. Our hope is from you: disappoint us not. We call upon you in our own behalf: leave us not forsaken in this benighted land. We call upon you in behalf of our children; let not them be left to perish for lack of instruction. We call upon you in behalf of those who have neither opportunity nor inclination to speak for themselves, perishing, dying sinners: leave them not in their blood. We call upon you in the name of the outcasts of society, sent and

daily sending thither. Administer to them that word of life, which may make their exile a blessing. Send us that gospel which you have received from the Lord to preach to every creature. Send among us one of yourselves, and we, and a seed of the Lord, shall rise to bless you. In order to make some provision for the cause of God amongst us, we have vested a certain sum of money in horned cattle, the best way in which it could be put out to accumulate, from the peculiar nature of this country, and the great advantage arising from horned cattle by natural increase. We look forward with a certain confidence, by the blessing of God, to be able, in a few years, from this fund, entirely to support this work; without at all considering the great probability of having our pecuniary means increased with the increase of members as at home. This fund we have by deed conveyed to proper trustees to be applied to the support of Preachers, etc.

"You have now our state and circumstances laid before you, and are the best judges of the qualifications necessary in the person you may be disposed to send out to us. Yet we would beg leave to suggest these necessary considerations: namely, 1. That he be a single man. We could not as yet maintain a Preacher's family, and the expense of sending them out would be too great for us to wish or expect you to incur. Besides, as he would have a great deal of active business; in fact, his way to make it would require greater attention and exertions, than a married man could be supposed to make or give. 2. That he be legally qualified; a certificate obtained in the usual way in England, will be in force here. 3. That he be rendered perfectly independent in all points of us and everybody else: a regular credit established for him, to draw on as he may deem fit. This suggestion arises not from our inability or unwillingness to support a Preacher; for, thanks be to God, we are all able and fully determined, and hereby pledge ourselves so to do. But for other reasons, which we need not here specify. 4. As every article of English manufacture is extremely dear, he should have a good supply of wearing apparel, house furniture, and; particularly, books. There are few or no books of the Methodist stamp among us: he should endeavour to bring a large supply of Hymn-books, Magazines, Religious Tracts, Biographical Sketches, Mr. Wesley's Sermons, and useful practical Works. A quantity he might sell from time to time, and some give away.

"In short, send us a Preacher tolerably supplied with wearing apparel and books, and, by the blessing of God, he shall be no farther expense to you. With a filial confidence in your paternal love, we subscribe ourselves Reverend and Honoured Fathers, your Children and Servants in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Signed, in the name and on behalf of the Society,
Thomas Bowden
J. HOSKING

You can view *James Colwell*, *The Illustrated History of Methodism. Australia 1812 to 1855; New South Wales and Polynesia 1856 to 1902. Sydney: William Brooks and Co., 1904. online at <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/EB/illustrated-history-of-methodism-colwell-1904/>*

ACCatalyst thanks Malcolm Prentis for suggesting this account of the first days of Australian Methodism.

Why my generation is wrong about gay marriage

University student Blaise Joseph is out of step with his peers

I'm 19, I'm a university student, I use social media, I play video games... and I oppose gay marriage. According to the polls and the stereotypes, I'm an anomaly.

This reflects the success the gay marriage lobby has had in selling its message of "marriage equality" among youth. It has very effective talking points: that marriage currently discriminates against gays, denying them their individual rights to express their love, and that two people of the same sex marrying each other doesn't affect anyone else.

These are emotionally compelling for my generation because of its infatuation with equality. Broad notions of egalitarianism are drummed into school students: we learn extensively about civil rights movements and are told countless times to respect all fellow students. "Equality is good." "Discrimination is bad."

Proponents of gay marriage exploit this by framing the debate in terms of gay rights, causing youth to instinctively fall back on platitudes of parity and ignore all other issues in the debate.

In addition, the constant mantra that gay marriage is "inevitable" and that younger generations are all in favour of it, as perpetuated by the gay marriage lobby and the media, peer pressures many young people into supporting it. They succumb to the group think mentality. As a result, they miss the logical fallacies in the case for gay marriage.

Firstly, there is far more to marriage than love and expression of love. If love was the only criteria for a marriage, then we would allow almost every conceivable type of relationship to be recognised as a marriage.

Also, the idea that the legal definition of marriage, meaning the social significance Australia attaches to marriage, doesn't affect society is an oxymoron. Marriage laws are fundamentally a question of what's best for society rather than a question of individual rights.

Furthermore, marriage must discriminate to have meaning. Defining marriage itself is an act of discrimination because it is saying what marriage is and what it isn't, by definition.

Once we get past these distractions, we can get to the core of the debate, which is simply this: should we have a special status for heterosexual relationships, as is the

status quo? It isn't "homophobic" to answer that heterosexual relationships make a unique contribution to society and marriage is a recognition of this.

Heterosexual relationships are unique in that they are orientated to procreation. They involve organic bodily union, through coitus, as part of the natural cycle of life and fundamental to the survival of humanity. The communal significance of this is acknowledged by society through marriage. Changing the legal definition of marriage to accommodate gay couples would mean the institution losing its significance.

Now, the standard rebuttal of this argument is that some marriages don't produce children for various reasons, such as infertility, and therefore procreation is unrelated to marriage. This misses the point: heterosexual relationships as a whole, not any given one relationship, are an essential part of society by their very physical nature. Individual married heterosexual couples who don't or can't produce children at a given point in time doesn't change the nature of the relationship—children not being produced is only incidental. With relationships between two people of the same sex, however, procreation isn't just impossible incidentally, it's impossible in principle—the very nature of the relationship means it isn't possible. The current definition of marriage recognises that heterosexual relationships are naturally orientated to procreation, and most marriages fulfil this.

Given that marriage is naturally linked to children, it is unsurprising that the social science indicates that the optimal family structure for a child is to be raised by its married biological parents. The newly released study *For Kids' Sake*, by Professor Patrick Parkinson AM from the University of Sydney, concluded that "...if there is one major demographic change in western societies that can be linked to a large range of adverse consequences for many children and young people, it is the growth in the numbers of children who experience life in a family other than living with their two biological parents, at some point before the age of 15."

continued bottom of page 12

The UCA and 'sacred unions'

Max Champion writes to the UCA General Secretary

To: Rev Terence Corkin,
General Secretary,
Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.
15 November 2011

Dear Terence,

On 12 June 2010 a Sacred Union Ceremony for couples in committed same-sex relationships was held at Brunswick Uniting Church in Victoria. In September 2010 Uniting Network Australia published on its website a document entitled "Sacred Union Ceremony towards pastoral and liturgical recognition of gay and lesbian couples in the UCA".

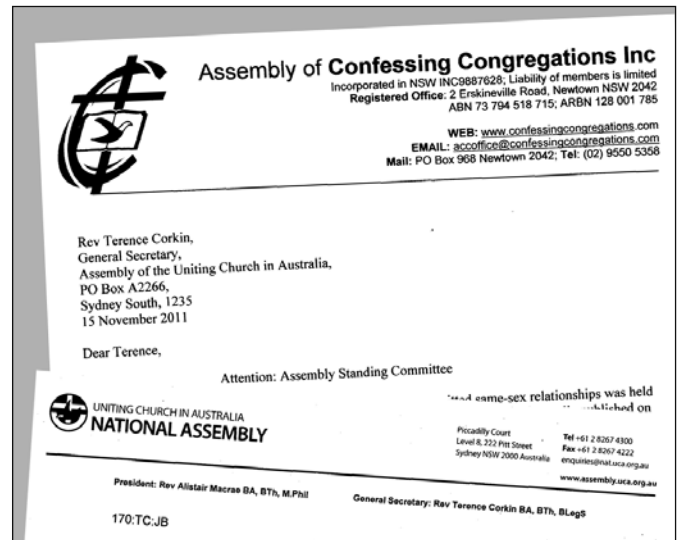
Therefore, it is highly likely that a proposal or proposals for the recognition of same-sex unions in the UCA will be presented to the 13th Assembly in Adelaide from 15-21 July 2012.

It would be most unfortunate if decisions about services for pastoral and liturgical recognition of same-sex unions were to be discussed, or approved, at the Assembly before undertaking a thorough analysis of the Reformed doctrine of marriage and the reasons for advocating such a radical change.

In view of the Uniting Church's clear statement on marriage as 'the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life,' which has been publicly reiterated by President Alistair Macrae, it is imperative that this biblical and theological work be carried out.

The members of the National Council of The Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA do not think that it would be appropriate to use the rationale put forward in the Sacred Union Ceremony.

As the attachment indicates, it relies on understand-



ings of covenant, love and social inclusion that are theologically deficient.

It would be a grave mistake to bypass this process and simply appeal to the principle of diversity. In Scripture there are two types of diversity: one that expresses our unity in Christ; the other that is at odds with our unity in Christ. If this distinction is ignored in the discussion about same-sex unions, and diversity of sexualities is simply appealed to as a sociological reality, then decisions on this and other matters of substance will lack theological integrity.

Moreover, they will be pastorally disastrous. If the UCA were to adopt services to bless sacred unions, then, in a diverse church, ministers, congregations and Presbyteries that object, would have to be given a conscientious right not to perform them.

If such ceremonies were to be approved by the Assembly then another pastoral issue arises. What is the UCA to make of members who have come out of homosexual-

from page 11

Additionally, a study by the American Witherspoon Institute *Ten Principles on Marriage and the Public Good* in 2008, which compiled the conclusions of dozens of the relevant sociological studies, found that children raised in intact homes by their wedded biological parents, taking into account other factors such as family income, fared best in terms of emotional health, educational achievement, and sexual development, to name just a few indicators.

Of course, some gay couples are better parents than some married heterosexual couples, but the principle remains that a child being raised by its biological parents is the ideal. It makes sense, therefore, for the government to recognise and encourage this, as it does currently by the institution of marriage.

The practical consequences of gay marriage for children and society would be long-term but still very

concerning. It would change the institution of marriage from being centred around the production and well-being of children to being based on the self-fulfilment of adults. It would obscure the value of opposite-sex parenting as an ideal, taking away the special status marriage gives to the best arrangement for the upbringing of children.

Society departing from the favourable norm in this way would adversely impact children, forcing the state to have a larger role in their welfare, such as in education and health.

The current definition of marriage acts as a bedrock of our society by recognising the intact, natural family for what we know to be the ideal. My generation may continue to be part of the gay marriage campaign well into the future, but thankfully Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, at least, are capable of standing up to the group think. *Originally published at onlineopinion.com.au*

ity and believe that what they and others have done is something not to be blessed or endorsed but redeemed?

Therefore, for the sake of biblical and theological integrity and pastoral and liturgical clarity, we urge Assembly Standing Committee and our National Leaders and Working Groups to proceed by doing this work prior to making pastoral decisions.

Yours sincerely,



Rev Dr Max Champion National Director
Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the UCA

cc. President Alistair Macrae
President-elect Rev Dr Andrew Dutney
Rev Dr Wes Campbell, Convenor of the National Working Group on Doctrine
Rev David Pitman, Convenor, National Working Group on Worship

The UCA General Secretary Rev Terence Corkin responds

To: Rev Dr Max Champion
National Director
Assembly of Confessing Congregations
December 12, 2011

Dear Max,

Thank you for your letter of November 15, 2011 in which you offer suggestions on how the 13th Assembly might respond to proposals seeking the "recognition of same sex unions".

The Standing Committee has not received any proposals from any Council of the Church on this matter. I am not aware of proposals coming from any other source that is in the direction anticipated by the ACC. Nevertheless I can offer with a fair degree of confidence that if a proposal was submitted to the 13th Assembly that purported to result in the "recognition of same sex unions" that it is highly likely that the theological work would be required before any decision of this nature.

I appreciate the concern of the ACC that a decision to support the blessing of, or in other ways recognise the legitimacy of same gender relationship, would be unwise without extensive and careful theological work being undertaken. My view is that the Assembly always undertakes careful theological and biblical work prior to making decisions of a significant theological nature. I hope that the members of the ACC can have confidence that this would also be the case in relation to new decisions about same gender relationships.

Yours Sincerely,
(unsigned)

Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary

STATS

So, what do Aussies believe?

A new research survey into the reasons why Australians don't accept Christian faith has just been released by Olive Tree Media, which is lead by the prominent Sydney baptist minister Karl Faase. Olive Tree Media produces a range of Christian media resources including television series, daily radio spots, e-mail devotions and devotional books.

"We decided a few months ago that we wanted to address some of the 'blocker' issues that stop people in the Australian community from coming to faith," said Karl Faase. "While there are many guesses about what these might be, we realised we didn't actually know," he said. "Once we discovered these 'blockers', we plan to produce a television series that addresses them."

Olive Tree Media commissioned McCrindle Research to carry out the research.

The research revealed the top ten barriers to Christian faith as being: Church abuse, hypocrisy, judging others, religious wars, suffering, issues around money, church being outdated, hell and condemnation, homosexuality and exclusivity.

"The survey was completed by 1,094 Australians from

The key issue Australians had were church scandals and reports of abuse

a national representative sample," said Mark McCrindle from McCrindle Research. "This was followed up with three focus groups made up of non-Christians. We had a group in their twenties, Generation Y; those who were starting families, Generation X and then baby-boomers," said Mark.

"We started with the national census data which reveals that three out of five Australians tick the Christianity box," Mark said. "However when we added the option of Spirituality to that question, the figure dropped to forty percent," he said. "Drilling down even further we discovered that only eight percent indicated that they were involved in practicing their religion or worshipped as part of a group."

The 4 in 10 (40%) Australians considering themselves as Christian, identified as Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant
continued bottom of page 12

STATS

from page 11

or Evangelical. 1 in 5 (19%) indicated that whilst they were spiritual, they were not religious. Furthermore, 3 in 10 (31%) did not identify with any religion or spiritual belief. Overall, 1 in 2 Australians do not identify with a religion.

Australians seemed to be moving away from their religious roots, with 3 in 10 (29%) expressing that whilst they had been shaped in a religious household and had religious connections, they were now no longer religious. On the other hand, 27% were continuing with the religion that they had been brought up with.

The survey asked people to identify who influenced them the most when it came to religious belief with the dominant answers being parents and family, followed by mass media, social media and the internet. 1 in 5 (20%) stated that their religious views and beliefs were mostly informed through books and articles; personal research and readings they have conducted about Christianity. For 1 in 4 Australians (25%), the media, social media and the internet were pivotal in influencing religious worldviews.

“When we asked what impact high profile atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens had on people’s beliefs, we were surprised to discover that three out of four said they had had no impact at all,” Mark said.

Fifty-one percent of those surveyed said they were not open to exploring or investigating other religious views and practices, however 41 percent were “somewhat” or “slightly” open.

While 40% of Australians identified their religion as Christianity, when given the statement “I consider myself a Christian”, the percentage dropped to 33%. While this does not mean that a third of the Australian population are active church goers and practising Christians, it does show that the term ‘Christian’ is one that this large percentage are prepared to embrace. While the perception is sometimes that Australia is a secular nation which pushes back on religion generally and Christianity specifically, this question, shows significant warmth towards Christianity. The results show that while that 28% of the population are ‘cool’ towards Christianity (-5 to -7), a quarter of the population (25%), while not calling themselves Christian, can be considered ‘warm’ towards Christianity (-1 to -3).

A key reason for the research was to discover the “blocker issues” that stopped people from considering Christian faith. These varied in order, depending on the background of the group being surveyed, but a common key blocker was the church’s stance on homosexuality, with 29 percent of Australians saying that this completely blocked them in engaging with Christianity.

The concept of hell and condemnation was another key blocker with 25 percent stating that the idea of a loving God who allowed people to go to hell, stopped them from engaging with Christianity.

When it came to Christians, the church and Christianity, the key issue Australians had were church scandals and reports of abuse, with 55 percent indicating that

these issues had a massive negative influence on their perceptions.

One interesting result was how Australians viewed celebrity endorsement of Christianity. “The biggest turns-offs were public figures or celebrities discussing their faith,” Mark said. “While these methods are used in the United States, Australians are seemingly distrustful of the motives behind public declaration of religious beliefs,” he said.

Public figures or celebrities discussing their faith was a turn off for 70% of respondents. 1 in 3 (32%) Australians indicated that this strongly repelled them from investigating religion and spirituality. Over half (58%) were repelled to some extent by miraculous stories, with 3 in 10 (28%) expressing that stories of people being healed or supernatural occurrences strongly repelled them from investigating religion and spirituality.

Interestingly, hearing stories from people who had changed because of their faith was also found to be a relatively significant repellent, with over half (55%) being repelled by this to some extent.

On the other hand, 3 in 5 Australians (60%) expressed that if they experienced a personal trauma or significant life change, they would be attracted to some extent towards investigating religion and spirituality.

Seeing others Christians living out a genuine faith was found to be an attraction for Australians to investigate religion and spirituality (54%). Over 1 in 10 Australians (11%) expressed that this would strongly attract them to explore religion and spirituality. Interestingly, when this was explored in the qualitative focus groups, it was noted that the younger participants did not respond as positively to this. The list of the top ten blockers also includes hypocrisy, judging others, religious wars, suffering, issues around money and exclusivity.

The next thing is to continue the conversation, to get people to talk about what is blocking people from Christian faith.

In launching the report, Dr Peter Jensen, the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney said he was encouraged by the survey’s findings on the influence of families on a person’s Christian values.

“The transmission of faith through families is tremendously significant,” he said. “When I was principal of Moore College and I asked an

incoming student how they came to faith, families were very significant.”

Archbishop Jensen added that the survey showed that the influence of friends was also very important. “Sixty percent of Australians don’t know a Christian,” he said.

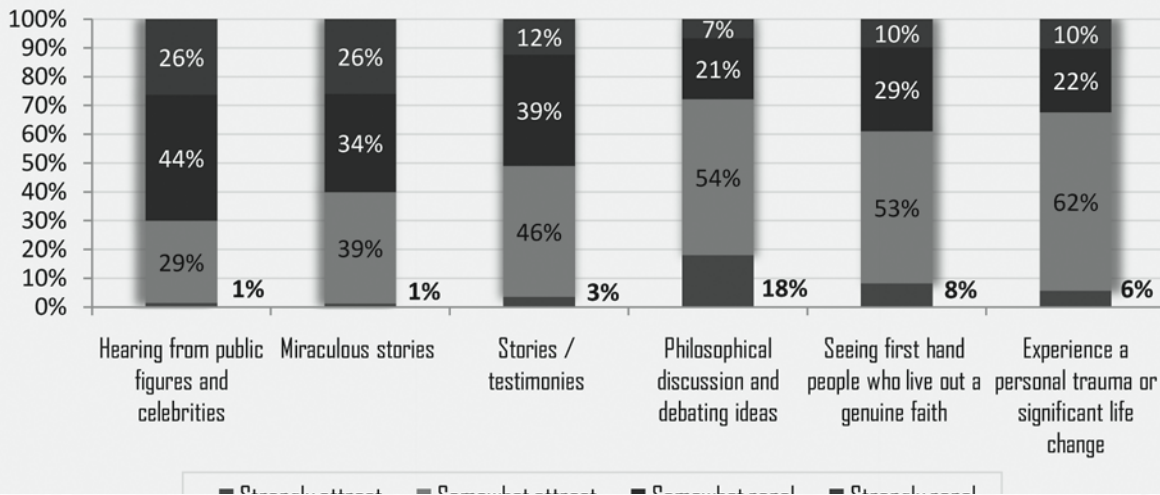
Following the release of the survey, Karl Faase said that there were a number of steps that Olive Tree Media wanted to see as outcomes.

“The next thing is to continue the conversation, to get people to talk about what is blocking people from Christian faith and how we interact with our community for the Gospel. We need to keep in mind that this is not ‘faith by focus group’, where we find out what people want and give it to them. It’s finding out what blocks people from hearing our message and being as clear as we can about what we do believe,” Karl said.

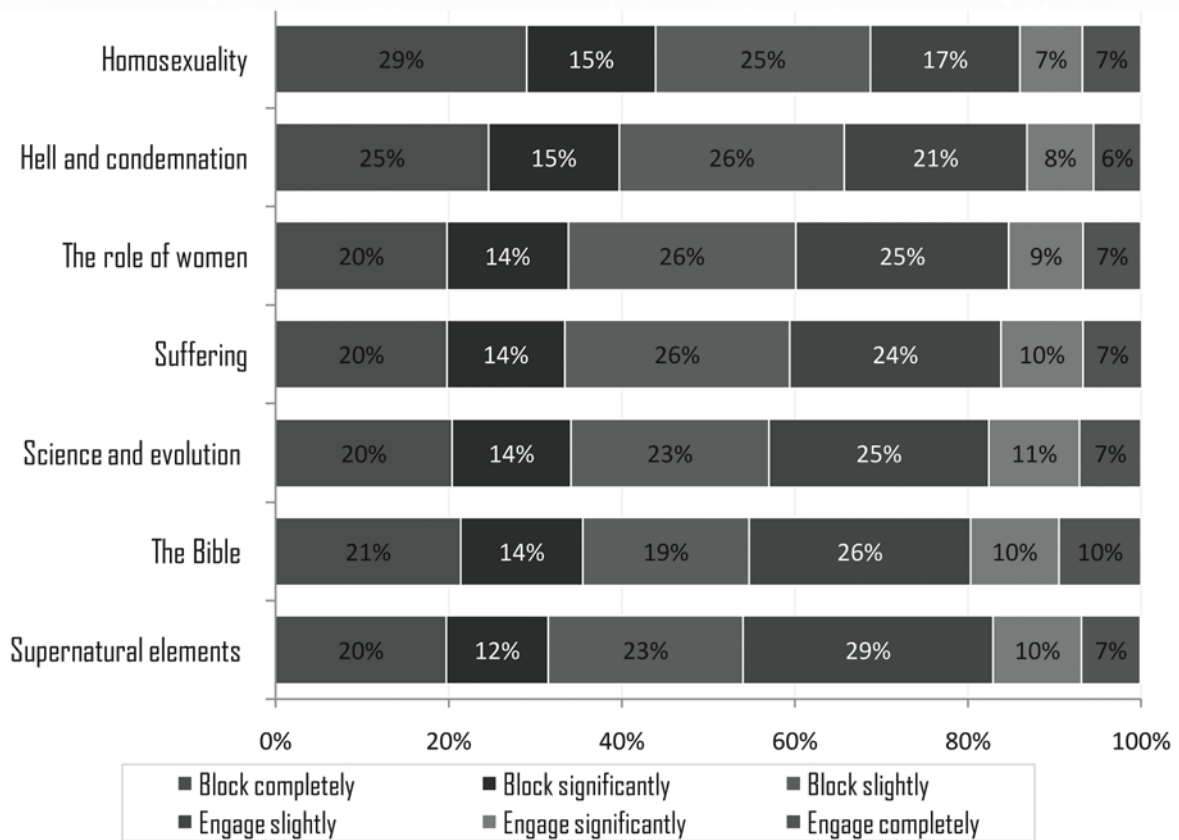
STATS

SEGMENT: NON-CHRISTIAN AND OPEN

The following results are filtered down by respondents who indicated that they did not identify with the Christian faith, as well as those who indicated that they were open to some extent to changing their current religious views (slightly to extremely open).



2. BELIEF BLOCKERS: DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE



“We will use the research to develop an Apologetics Series for television, DVD, web and radio.

“We plan on a 10 part series that looks at each of the top ten ‘blocker issues’ and gives an accessible response so that the average Australian can engage with the mate-

rial and make an informed belief and lifestyle choice.”

The graphs used on these pages come from the report *McCrindle Research* prepared for Olive Tree Media. Copies of the full report can be obtained for \$20 from Olive Tree Media at olivetreemedia.com.au

Alternative Gospel of the American Church

Recently a friend gave me a copy of the book *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, written by Michael Horton and published in America by Baker Books. The book is a scathing critique of the American Church, both liberal and evangelical. Horton believes that the American Church has deviated from “the faith once delivered to the saints” in a number of inter-related ways.

Firstly, he says that American preaching and practice indicate that American Christians are focused more on themselves than on God and his saving work for all believers. “It seems,” he says, “that we come to church less to be transformed by the Good News than to celebrate our own transformation and to receive fresh marching orders for transforming ourselves and our world rather than being swept into God’s new world.”

Horton’s concern is that the American church is getting dangerously close to the place in every day life where the Bible is “mined for relevant quotes but is largely irrelevant on its own terms.”

Sin has been trivialised in this theology. It no longer refers to a wrong against God but only a wrong against ourselves for failing to achieve our potential to be happy and to feel good about ourselves. There is no place in this theology for Psalm 51:4-5 where the author acknowledges “Against you (God), you alone have I sinned”.

When sin is trivialised in the way it is by this alternative gospel and God’s love takes care of any alienation that might occur there is no longer any place or need for reconciliation or atonement.

The question then arises, what is it that Christ does? The answer seems to be that Jesus Christ is “just a coach with a good game plan for our victory rather than a saviour who has already achieved it for us.” Jesus’ life and death can no longer be understood as atonement for sin or as a mediator between us and God. The most we can say about him is that he was a great philosopher, teacher, example, adviser and partner in helping us to achieve our own aspirations but we are left to do the hard work of achieving our goals and doing whatever it is we are called to do. This is not good news and not the gospel which the New Testament sets forth and the Church has affirmed through the centuries. It is more like the heresy of Pelagianism which troubled the Church in the fifth century which asserted that we must share the task of achieving our salvation.

The second major heresy Horton finds widely spread in American Christianity is Gnosticism. This heresy was a major challenge to orthodoxy in the early church. Gnosticism minimized the witness of the apostles and the Scriptures and maximized the inner experience of

the individual. Truth is no longer to be found in creeds and confessions but in being alone with God. The tendency is well illustrated by the old hymn, “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses, and the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses”. Certainly it is important that we should have a sense of God’s presence through the Spirit but unless we have the highest respect for the historical witnesses there is no telling how we will end up.

These developments in American Christianity may seem to be of little relevance for us but with the constant flow of gurus from the USA we are bound to feel the influence of Christless Christianity here. Horton warns us to be wary.

I found the book very interesting, though not everywhere easy reading, but I would commend it to all Australian church leaders who are committed to the historic Christian teaching on the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Gordon Dicker is a past Moderator of the NSW Synod, and former Principal of UTC.



Crystal Cathedral, Orange County California



Oran Park town

Camden Uniting Church and the NSW Synod Mission Resource Fund (SMRF grant) launched the South-West Sydney Outreach Project with Camden Uniting Church in late 2009. Pastor Terry Cunningham was appointed Outreach & Groups Pastor in November, and the first stages of the project began to emerge in February 2010.

Because Camden Uniting Church had buildings in Camden, but not elsewhere in its ministry region, it decided to pursue growth in Camden and in new housing estates primarily through small groups.

About one year later, Camden Uniting Church has: more than doubled its small groups from 15 to 34 with plans for many more; established a UCA presence in several new housing estates (notably Oran Park Town); started a discipleship training process; offered new courses and assistance to unchurched and needy people; successfully cooperated with a wide range of government and community organisations to grow “social capital” within the

region, and increased public awareness through positive corporate and media networking.

The church recently won a contract to run a community development program that gives the church face-to-face contact with every new resident in Sydney’s largest South-West housing development. This gives the church oversight of authorised community events and the budget to run these. The church also won a tender for free office space for two years. This comes with an expectation that the church will facilitate other community organisations – something that is already happening.

Camden Uniting Church has been able to offer new opportunities to other UCA churches as well as churches of other denominations. “It’s great to see the Church getting involved at the front end, instead of always being behind,” Terry said.

But there have been obstacles. These have included: A time-poor commuter congregation hard pressed to do more than “regular church”; the resignation of a Senior Pastor which resulted in changes to ministry team responsibilities; a pre-existing problem in maintaining consistent support; a delay in

small group multiplication as people adapted to a new ministry paradigm; overcoming “town church” thinking in the midst of rapid regional growth; erratic expansion of new housing estates because of changing Government policy (e.g., first home buyer grants); increases in interest rates; and disagreements between developers and Council over developments that impacted church plans. “In the face of these challenges, we have had to work much closer,” Terry said.

How does this affect an outreach pastor? “In a situation like this, change is the only constant. And it’s not just churches that are affected. It’s the same for all involved – State and local government, developers, schools, universities, transport systems, retailers – and even the local fruit shop. Our church meets regularly with all sorts of interested parties as we press ahead,” he said.

“I guess I’m not your average UCA pastor,” Terry said. “Whether in a corporate or church setting, my mission has often been to start something brand new, or to take something through a period of change and into the next level.”

Before becoming a pastor, Terry

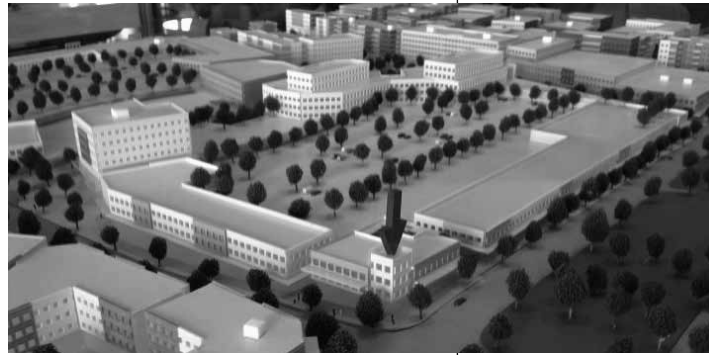
LOCAL CHURCH

was a metropolitan journalist, editor and finance industry marketing director. He became a Christian through an Anglican outreach at 26 then started four Pentecostal churches before coming to the Uniting Church. A former director of both Wesley Mission Sydney and Anglicare NSW, he is currently completing a Masters in Theology and has studied Management, Marketing, Communications and Financial Planning.

The Camden-SMRF project is funded for five years. "As things grow, it's important to remember the efforts of others," Terry said. "Our former Senior Pastor, Rev Colin Seymour, saw the possibilities some years ago, as did our church council Chair, Doug Ferris, and others. SMRF also had the foresight to back this potential."

Camden Uniting Church is a large, growing evangelical church serving an area bounded by Bringelly, Austral and Leppington to the north, Campbelltown to the east, Warragamba and The Oaks to the west, and Picton to the south.

Within a few years, the population of [Camden Municipality] area will



Model of Oran Park CBD

equal that of Canberra. "So this is a time to think and act creatively. This is the time to claim a place in the future – through prayer and worship, evangelism, outreach, innovation, partnerships, small groups, faith communities, etc. Potentially, thousands of people from many different backgrounds will come to Christ and experience the Uniting Church's breadth of service and grace," Terry said.

"My core motivation is to gather people together so they can understand and respond to God's call upon their lives, be lifted from their afflictions, and enjoy a close relationship with Christ that eventually leads to discipling others.

"Jesus builds his Church, but we have a part to play. I regularly ask myself, 'Will this activity or plan ultimately lead someone to Christ?

Or is it simply another of those 'good things' we all do? We should do good things; because it's good to 'do good'. It's high on God's agenda, and it's part of the example Christ left us. But he promises to bless particular activities.

"Although the Gospel is always at the front of my thoughts, my work in the welfare and social justice sectors tells me there is more than one way to deliver this.

"On a personal level, I find full-bodied praise and worship and regular prayer absolutely essential, and I greatly appreciate my support team at Camden Uniting Church. The church at Camden is a warm, friendly, inclusive place with a mass of potential. And it has a strength of character worth replicating elsewhere."

www.camdenuniting.org.au/

Prayer is work

In the book Nehemiah, we find a man who identified with the sins of Israel, felt God's heart for the breaking down of the wall of Jerusalem and received a great vision from God to rebuild the City of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah organized the people who were all from different backgrounds, skills and careers, like a rainbow of all different colors, diverse in backgrounds, cultures and giftedness. Together they achieved the impossible. He demonstrates for us the power of unity when the Body of Christ prays, has a plan to work together, gets organized and works in unity with one another.

This reminded me of a reading from 1 Corinthians 12 which talks to us about Christ's body. Every person is unique and special to God.

And also unique in their ministry and role within the body of Christ.

One day I was making the evening meal on the stove, and my husband Brian said "Are you going to put carrots from the garden in the stir-fry" I had already grated and put them in, but he couldn't see them. There were ingredients with the naked eye, that were bigger or easily identifiable but those that weren't.

Within our communities of faith there are those who pray and intercede faithfully for individuals, the church, communities and nation. Sometimes we don't even know that they are praying and interceding, even so, much hard work is being done behind the scenes. Each part being important, even though we may not see them physically working, they work very hard in prayer

and intercession. Prayer is work! Intercessors make requests, urge, plead, beg, sacrifice, and make war on issues that impact final outcomes for those they serve. Impacts that may not always be seen in our life time.

Nehemiah demonstrates for us, how prayer affects the success of our work. To begin a work with prayer as Hudson Taylor on occasion said: "You can work without praying but that is a rather bad plan. You will, however, never be able to pray seriously without working."

Nehemiah and his people rebuilt the entire wall around Jerusalem and all its massive gates, and did it only 52 days! A wall completed in spite of opposition, shows the great power of prayer and unity!
Mandy Scott

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

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

- a) To confess Christ according to the catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage in the Basis of Union, by:
 - i) upholding the Scriptures' prophetic and apostolic testimony to Christ as the final authority for the Uniting Church's faith and life;
 - ii) calling the Uniting Church to

determine matters of doctrine and ethics according to the teaching of the Scriptures and the faith as understood by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church;

- iii) calling the councils and congregations of the Uniting Church to uphold the Basis of Union and Constitution:

- iv) providing biblically-grounded leadership in partnership with other confessing movements;

- v) developing ecumenical partnerships for the more effective proclamation of the Gospel in our pluralist nation; and

- vi) establishing national, state and territory bodies to implement the Charter as approved by the inaugural meeting of the Association, and seeking the renewal of the Uniting Church.

b) To undertake such religious, educational or other charitable activities which are incidental to the above objectives.

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

Supporting Membership forms are available at: <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/assembly/members/individual-members/>

Interested congregational contacts please contact the office or see the website.

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$35.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$60.00 p.a

Contact (02) 9550 5358. email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com mail: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042

Consider making a Bequest to the ACC

It has been wonderful to see the support and hope evidenced for the ACC appeal, and in particularly 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 wills.

ACC DIARY

What happens next

- March 5-6, 2012: National Council and Commissions Combined Meeting – Sydney.
- September 13-15, 2012: ACC National Conference and AGM - Nunyara Conference Centre, Adelaide.
- 2012 is an Assembly meeting year. The 13th National Uniting Church Assembly will be held in Adelaide 15-22 July. The President-elect Rev. Dr Andrew Dutney will be installed as President for the term 2012-2015.

Ways to support ACC

Some congregations have developed excellent ways of raising their membership contribution or providing an extra donation to the establishment and foundation of the ACC. Some of these are included below.

- A special Sunday offering: where an offering is taken for the work of the ACC
- A donation box: one congregation has a donation box in their church for the ACC. In less than a year they raised over \$1200, as well as giving a \$1000 membership contribution
- Purchasing Individual Supporting Memberships: some individuals and one congregation purchase supporting memberships on behalf of other members who cannot afford membership themselves. This increases the involvement of local members and provides a different way of encouraging members to support the ACC individually as well.
- Fundraising events: several regional groups have organised events to encourage and network and have also had a voluntary or retiring offering for the work of the ACC.

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".



The Pibara Wanderer

A Tory and a red

The Iron Lady (M, 2010)

Most members will have heard the expression “The Iron Lady”, and many of you may have thought of seeing the film. It is well worth viewing and will no doubt bring back a few memories for people familiar with the Margaret Thatcher era. Meryl Streep adds another excellent role to her portfolio of character portrayals that have garnered her many accolades over four decades. She plays Margaret Thatcher through the later years of her political life, weaving back and forth from the period of her political leadership to her “twilight years” as the present Baroness Thatcher. She is most effective as the elderly Baroness.

Alexandra Roach plays the younger Margaret Roberts in some typically well-cast period scenes, highlighting the move into politics accompanied by future husband Denis. They were married in 1951 and he died in 2003, and it is her memory of, and relationship to Denis that cements the film as almost a form of romantic drama, a love story that did not end with death.

Thatcher was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1970-1990, and is often linked with the other significant leader of the period Ronald Reagan who was U.S. President during the 1980s as they were both highly profiled in the end times of the Soviet era. Thatcher’s Prime Ministership had many significant events, including high-level disputes with Trade Unions, the Falklands War, continuing IRA matters including the Maze Prison hunger strikes, and the bombing of the Brighton Hotel during the 1984 Conservative Party Conference.

The film is not a straight historical drama, as the writer and director have chosen a psychological approach, with Baroness Thatcher reflecting on her life, mostly with Denis still around, giving input in sometimes odd and amusing ways which irritates her, but also clearly shows their terms of endearment. The film also illustrates present issues with dementia, and this is one of the aspects that has made it controversial—the other being that it is neither an apologia or left-wing critique for Thatcher’s policies, thus satisfying neither party.

There are some excellent and memorable sayings which go to the heart of the psychodrama and they attempt to show how the Thatcher character was built.

“It used to be about trying to do something. Now it’s about trying to be someone”... “Watch your thoughts for they become words. Watch your words for they become actions. Watch your actions for they become... habits. Watch your habits, for they become your character. And watch your character, for it becomes your destiny! What we think we become.”

In 2007 Margaret Thatcher’s statue in the Houses of Parliament was unveiled. In her brief speech she commented: “I might have preferred iron—but bronze will do ... It won’t rust.” This concluding comment brought to my mind many biblical references, and given Thatcher’s Christian background and deeply held convictions, the lack of any direct Christian consideration within the film makes one wonder why some of these deeper spiritual and eternal questions were neglected.

Red Dog (PG, 2010)

Already out on DVD is the popular Australian film *Red Dog*. Any film about a dog is usually a winner, and this one tells the story of the legend of Red Dog, a companion or ‘common’ dog for many in the mining community at Dampier in Western Australia during the 1970s. Much has been written about *Red Dog* and there is a seemingly never-ending range of bumper stickers and souvenirs, but this movie was based on Louis De Bernières 2001 book *Red Dog*. The dog colloquially known as The Pibara Wanderer has a dedicated statue erected near the entrance to the town of Dampier.

Rio Tinto helped to finance the film and the film does have a public relations aspect about it, as the mining people are basically all warm good-hearted people.

US actor Josh Lucas plays John Grant, the person who is Red Dog’s real master. The film combines elements and references from many Australian films, even in the techniques used one can see the influence of iconic films such as *Wake in Fright*, *Mad Max*, *Crocodile Dundee* through to *The Castle*.

John’s love interest is Nancy (played by Rachael Taylor), the mining company secretary, and one all the miners have an interest in, but the American wins her heart.

The Red Dog legend is told through flashbacks and stories as people gather in the pub while Red Dog is struggling in a room nearby to survive (he has been poisoned). Everyone has their own story to tell, and Red Dog appears as the quintessential companion, match-maker, therapist and good mate.

While promoted as a family film, there are some scenes which need to be critiqued. There are no overt sex scenes, but the main couple end up in bed quickly. The scenes with the pub and drinking and partying are of course the most authentic, but there are some demeaning references to women and the fun attitude toward drunkenness and recovery is something that should never be accepted. Ironically there is little swearing. The one Christian scene reinforces religion in a traditional role.

Red Dog has themes of mateship and loyalty. It is also about people searching for life and truth in a hard world. While it may be stereotyped, at least it did not have the dog sacrificing its life for the town.

Peter Bentley is the Executive Consultant for the ACC.