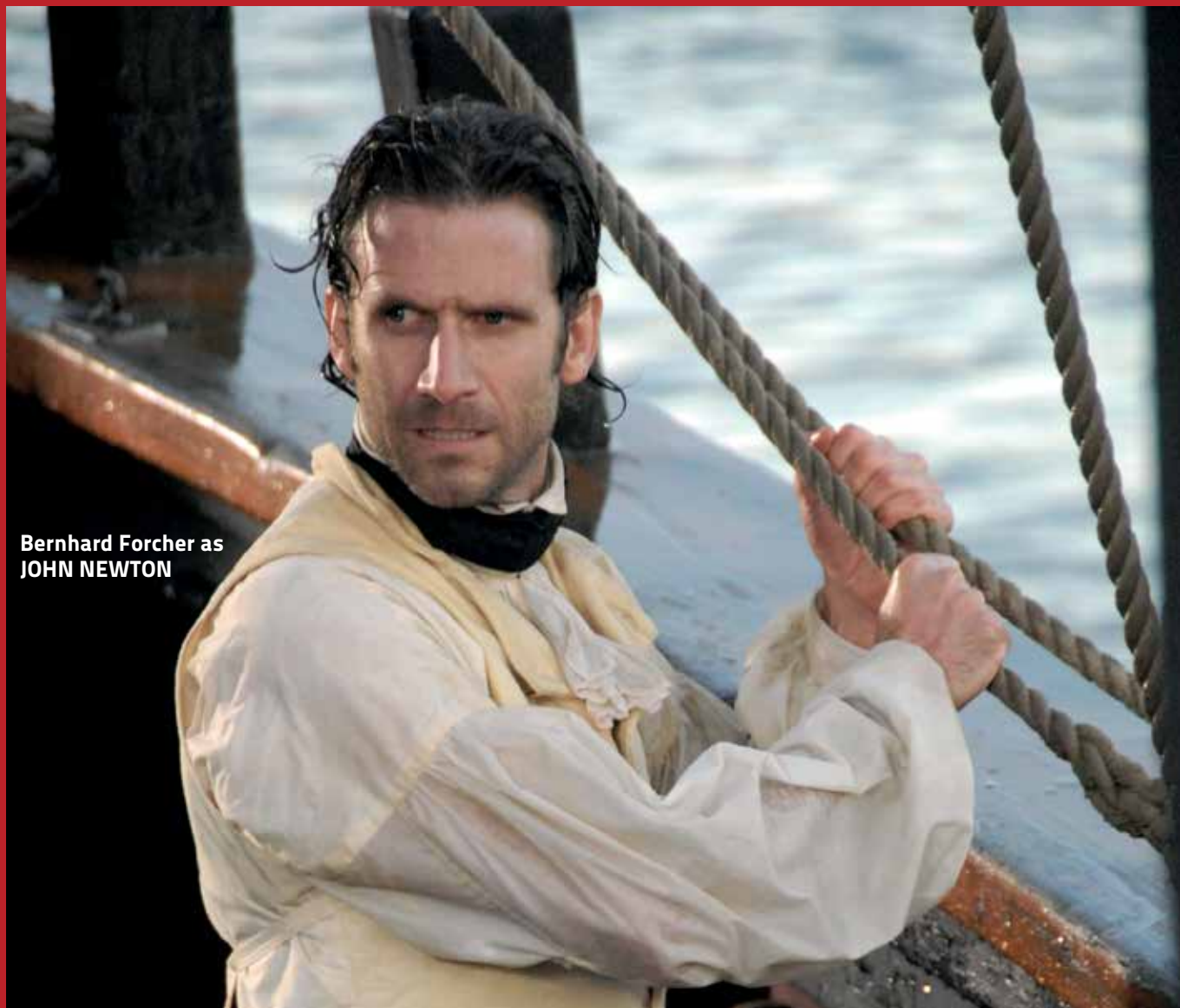


ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



Bernhard Forcher as
JOHN NEWTON

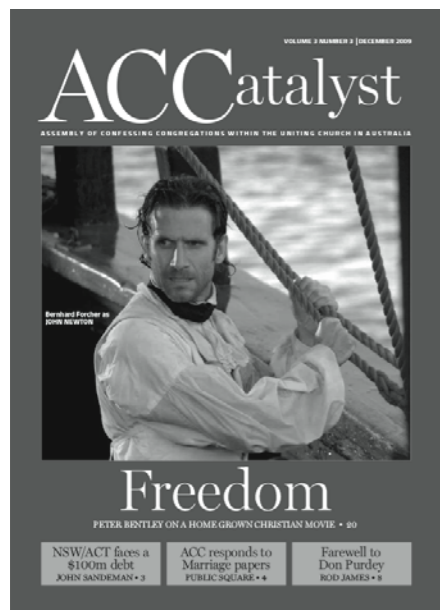
Freedom

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Cover photo from Freedom the movie

EDITORIAL

The Inevitable

In this *ACCatalyst* a number of articles deal with farewelling a beloved companion from this mortal life.

I must confess that as editor I find some of this material confronting. It is just not the sort of thing I am used to preparing for publication whether in *ACCatalyst* or somewhere else.

On reflection, I should be ashamed about that.

Who other than Christians should

be able to write boldly yet gently about death? To write with confidence as Don Purdey does about the most important thing—of being saved—even as he faced the effects of his motor neurone disease? Of passing from life to afterlife? Of great confidence in our Saviour?

Death and celebration are joined together in this edition of *ACCatalyst*. *John Sandeman*

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Looking back

This week I had several days of irritations. I haven't had major issues to deal with, but a number of smaller things that have taken time and been frustrating and if you let them, those things can leave you feeling discouraged.

But also this week, in my spare time I have been sorting through photos of my life, from babyhood to adulthood. I know it's not a good idea to live in the past, but I have found it quite therapeutic. There's a photo of me learning to crawl, then I learnt to walk and to write and to ride a bike. I've overcome a lot of obstacles in my life and learnt how to handle many challenges. If I could deal with all of that, then I can deal with a few small issues now.

More significantly than remembering what I have done, is looking back and remembering what God has done for me. He made me unique. He was with me as I learnt and grew. He kept me safe as a youngster when I fell into a flooded creek. He drew me back to himself when I unwisely tried to go off on my own path without him. He let me feel him near me when I was frightened. When I

Hilary Sandeman



asked him to come into my life, he did and forgave my sin and called me his child. God has been faithful right through my life so there's no reason why he should abandon me this week when I need him.

The Israelites were exhorted to remember what God did for them when he delivered them from Egypt. They were supposed to celebrate it each year, so that they would remember God's great power and love for them as a nation. If they had done this, they may not have been so tempted to run after powerless idols.

And as Christians, we also look

back. At any time of the year we can remember Easter and that should be an encouragement to us. If Jesus had the power to defeat death and sin then he ought to be able to handle my weakness and sins and problems. If Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, he ought to be able to answer my prayers.

What Jesus did at Easter is not just a memory or a story for us; it's a reality that transforms our lives today, and gives us courage and passion as we seek to serve God in whatever situations we may find ourselves.

Robyn

UCA NEWS

UCA in NSW/ACT has a \$100m debt

The Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT adopted a slightly different way of getting through the Global Financial crisis. They kept on spending on essential services to those in need during this difficult time by maintaining distributions from their financial arm Uniting Financial Services (UFS).

This distribution, over and above earnings, depleted their preferred capital position in UFS that necessitated a capital injection by the Synod. While the synod has assets sufficient for their work they—along with most major denominations—have cash (liquidity) constraints that have necessitated a loan of \$100m.

While other church regions or dioceses responded to losing money in the GFC, or through losses from school start-ups, by cutting back or selling property the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT kept making distributions for what they consider essential services. The Sydney Anglican diocese is an example of a body that cut back spending during the GFC because of losses. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has gone through a painful season of selling property in 2013-2014 to make up for school losses.

But the Synod of NSW and the ACT took a different tack. During the GFC, instead of distributing money from earnings for use by congregations presbyteries and other missions of the church UFS capital was drawn down. By the end of the GFC this meant that the UFS's capital was significantly reduced.

"Throughout the GFC and beyond, UFS continued to distribute by reducing its capital (retained earnings and contributed capital) to meet Synod expectations" is how a Synod Standing Committee working paper describes it. "By July 2012, capital continued to decrease to a level that the Board regarded as unacceptable and was beginning to complicate our existing bank loan."

The \$100m loan was a reasonable response to the immediate liquidity constraint and UFS's depleted capital. Any debate centres on what to

do next. The loan—although much smaller than previous year's whole of Synod borrowings—is also controversial because a number of UCA members were unaware of it and have been taken by surprise.

The loan was needed because a certain amount of capital is required to enable UFS to function prudently. "Based on our investing activities, it was considered as prudent to have capital of around \$100m", the working paper states. This was needed to make sure the property and other investment risks of UFS met the prudential risk-weighted capital adequacy standards that would apply if it were a comparable commercial entity.

The Property Trust, which holds the UCA property in NSW and the ACT which amount to an insurable value of approximately \$5bn, took out a loan of \$100m from a bank in 2013, and used it as immediate liquidity to invest capital in UFS.

UFS, boosted by the \$100m capital injection, has continued to make the good distributions to the Church's mission. They earned over 9 per cent in 2014—a good result.

The interest bill of the Synod is well covered by the UFS earnings, leaving a surplus of approximately \$4.5m to distribute. This leads some in the UCA to argue that the status quo could go on for some time although effective stewardship of overall Synod resources dictate that relative returns and risks need to be constantly evaluated on a whole of Synod portfolio basis.

Action to extinguish the debt by 2015 is suggested by another Synod Standing Committee working paper called "Budget 2015—Tipping point" by the Executive Director of Uniting Resources, John Kitchener.

"These proposals involve significant changes to the conduct of Synod in terms of its governance, structures and use of resources" the paper says. "The proposals are risky, certainly unpopular and probably difficult."

Kitchener makes an important caveat. "Whilst recognising the financial challenges we face, it is

important to remember that neither Synod nor UFS is insolvent. It is also important to recognise that the current financial stewardship practices are unsustainable and change is inevitable."

The initial Tipping Point paper is concerned with more than just money. It is argued that the structures of the church, built for a larger and growing church, can not possibly work for the current model of church.

Instead of revenue flowing from congregations to presbyteries and then to the Synod, Synod is asked to fund many activities. For every dollar sent to the Synod Fund, \$2.50 used to flow out from the Fund, as *ACCatalyst* understands the current position.

Among the initial "Tipping Point" proposals for change is a major restructure: "Defining the role of the Synod Office is the first step to determine what services/ costs should or should not be provided/ absorbed by the Synod."

Changing the funding model proposing that "The Synod develop a document on its funding principles and priorities, comparable to the Sydney Anglican's Statement of Funding Principles and Priorities 2013" which *ACCatalyst* understands to be a cautious model.

The initial Tipping Point paper suggests for discussion a major review of education, questioning whether the UCA can afford seven seminaries spread across Australia. This issue is especially acute when many parishes can no longer afford a stipend (wage) for a minister, and lay leaders may not have access to training. Other suggestions include:

- Moving Synod operations out of rented properties.
- Selecting "lighthouse sites" where UnitingCare can be located with a congregation as part of a suggested growth strategy.
- A "land-based levy" on all property.

Kitchener wrote his initial paper as a conversation-starter about the UCA Synod of NSW and the ACT using their resources more wisely—and this includes paying back the \$100m debt.

More than that, there is a desire to move the church on from simply maintaining its structures – and to set priorities and then build its structure and finances around them.

John Sandeman



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PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Public Square special

The following is a summary response of the ACC to the UCA ASSEMBLY PAPERS on MARRIAGE and SAME GENDER RELATIONSHIPS. It is published in the public interest, particularly as Synod newspapers in June, July and August have been virtually silent on the existence of the Report (first published in May). Surprisingly, in view of the deadline for responses by 10 October, none has initiated an in-depth discussion of this vital and controversial issue. Church members could be forgiven for thinking that this is a deliberate tactic of Assembly and Synod leaders. If only a few responses are received, it will be easy to argue that there is little opposition in the church to the agenda implicit in the Report. When that is conveyed to the Fourteenth Assembly in July 2015, undermining the church's high doctrine of marriage can be easily accomplished, with widespread public consequences.

Discussion Paper on Marriage:

The theology of marriage in the Uniting Church in Australia: a commentary on the marriage service in Uniting in Worship 2.

It is disappointing that this crucial paper by the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine (AWDG) does not compare the Marriage Service in Uniting in Worship 2 (UW2) with UW1 or draw on the liturgies of UCA's ecumenical partners, particularly those with whom joint statements on marriage have been produced (eg Roman Catholic Church 1999). By

uncritically accepting UW2 as the benchmark of the Christian doctrine of marriage, it deprives us of the richness of other covenantal and sacramental approaches to marriage.

It is encouraging to see that, despite its failure to see the liturgical softening of UW2, the Discussion Paper acknowledges the link between Genesis 1 and Ephesians 5 and insists that "the foundational importance of these scriptural passages cannot be dismissed". Moreover, in a passage that invites further reflection, it says "If ever the Uniting Church was to re-define marriage to include same-gender partnerships, it would remain theologically impossible to bypass this deep scriptural tradition in which male-female duality and male-female union are located right near the heart of the divine purpose." (No 13 "Scriptural language")

• Since the establishment of the Sexuality Task Group at the Seventh Assembly (1994) there has been a reluctance to give account of the complex biological, sociological, psychological and volitional factors that influence same-gender attraction. Despite this, arguments are still put forward on the unstated and unexamined assumption that, like ethnicity, it is biologically determined (immutable). This has had the effect of falsely treating opposition to homosexuality and same-gender marriage as a form of racism. This fiction has been maintained to obtain public support from people who, otherwise, would be horrified to think that, unlike ethnicity, choice and discipline are essential aspects of forming sexual relationships. This is recognised in the homosexual community. Many people are adamant that they are not 'hardwired,' as the paper states (No

9), but have chosen to undermine heterosexism.

• It is disappointing that the paper doesn't consider the theological and social implications of life-long unions between bisexual and transgender partners. Presumably companionship is possible in these, and many other forms of sexual partnership, but the use of 'same-gender marriage' would seem to exclude both groups, something that an inclusive church would be loath to accept.

In this regard, it is surprising that the paper does not discuss its use of 'same-gender' rather than 'same-sex,' to describe these relationships, particularly when the latter is more common in public debate. Is the term 'same gender relationships' used here and in Assembly resolution 12.31 to soften for public consumption the actual context of homosexual sexual activity?

Views of Marriage in the UCA:

Report on a consultation process - 2013 (by Robert Bos)

The Report states the obvious. There have been diverse marriage customs between and within communities through the ages and strong differences of opinion today in the UCA and other churches on sexual relationships in general and same-gender marriage in particular. But it doesn't provide accurate, research-based evidence for its findings. Nor does it articulate the theological, social and personal grounds on which people disagree. The impression is given that 'enlightenment' moves from narrow, exclusivist Biblicism and cultural primitivism to open, inclusive love.

The conclusion (p24) unmasks the underlying prejudice that masquerades as objective research. Clearly, Robert Bos approves of the fact that among "a wide range of views" "many demonstrated openness to change and reviewing their position". Thus the high moral ground is claimed, dissent by indigenous, migrant-ethnic and evangelical voices is discouraged, and the outcome skewed in favour of changing the UCA's doctrine of marriage.

The unstated assumption that theology is primarily the outworking of our diverse personal and social experience, rather than the articulation of the reality of God attested in Scripture, needs to be argued, particularly as it also determines whether the doctrine of the UCA on this and other fundamental matters is consistent with our confession of faith in the Basis of Union.

The Report makes it clear that the issue will be decided, not by arguing from basic theological principles, but by the desire to accommodate incompatible beliefs

The Views of Marriage Report shares the presuppositions of the resolution at the Thirteenth Assembly (2012) and the way in which the consultations took place. Robert Bos' conclusion that "A resource document on the theology of marriage which thoughtfully and fairly considered the issues, rather than seeking to persuade people to a particular point of view, would be well received", (p24) is a pre-emptive strike for the 'particular point of view' that prizes diversity over Christ-centred unity.

The Report makes it clear that the issue will be decided, not by arguing from basic theological principles, but by the desire to accommodate incompatible beliefs about the sanctity of marriage. On a superficial reading, this will satisfy the ideology of diversity that pervades postmodern culture and the UCA. But, in practice, it will marginalise those who uphold orthodoxy. Once orthodox faith and doctrine is regarded as one form of diversity, it is inevitable that the ecumenical faith of the church attested in Scripture and affirmed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds will become optional.

menical faith of the church attested in Scripture and affirmed in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds will become optional.

Study Guide for Discussion Paper on Marriage

It is unfortunate that the Study Guide doesn't encourage deeper engage-

ment with the Biblical and theological materials related to the sanctity of marriage, some of which are included in the Discussion Paper on Marriage.

A question could also have been asked about the statement in the Discussion Paper on Marriage that, 'It is clear that same-gender marriage is not simply about making marriage more inclusive, but about altering the definition of marriage.' (Same-gender marriage (No 16)

IAN CLARKSON

You Betcha Boldness!

St Paul asked prayer for one thing above all else—*paressia*. Translated boldness it has the root idea of a mouth that isn't dry! He wanted confident natural speech before those who might ridicule or behead him for evidencing the truth of the resurrected Messiah. In every generation the glorious benefits of Messiah's kingdom have advanced and blessed individuals communities and nations as a result of bold testimony. We can and must be bold or else be silent.

I was converted through the ministry of someone who was bold. I reckon that's true for all of you readers. Might have been nurtured gently but converting ministry is bold. Without boldness nothing much happens for the kingdom. Liberalism and scientism have intimidated church leaders. Not so apologist John Lennox, speaking recently in Australia who demonstrates the bold assumption, or the 'given' of the Bible's authority rather than trying to prove it. This was the way of the Apostles, Reformers and the leaders of the Great Awakening who by it stimulated the formation of the democracies of the New World as well as signing to the gates of heaven.

Aborigine David Unaipon, Australia's Da Vinci conceptualised the helicopter, invented the modern farming shears and patented a host of inventions. But he was also a bold witness to Jesus and was arrested more than once for preaching in the open air on the streets of Adelaide. His favourite saying "Look at me and see what the Bible can do" boldly evidenced Christ in power. He knew his righteousness

came from God. His picture is on our \$50 note. We should tell our children and grand children about him.

Boldness is confidence in the truth of the Gospel and rejection of the pseudo authorities of men and culture which oppose it. It is essential weaponry today for Christ's soldiers and servants. Seeing and hearing this, the afflicted of society will listen and be glad, according to the Psalmist.

It is right to be confident about the commands of God and about the written testimony to our Lord Jesus. It may be a reverent prayer at grace time when all the family are around including those who have drifted and are in danger of turning their backs on eternal salvation. It may be a clear comment about the social evils of openly-promoted homosexuality or the heresy of gay marriage. It may be the rational assertion of the folly of a Creator-less evolutionary myth. Or a score of other opportunities coming out of careful listening to our grand children.

A Year 10 lad in our home Bible seminar was bold. Leaving for school one morning recently he quipped to his parents about being in a new class—"I wonder how long it will take for somebody to pay me out for being a Christian". Off he went with almost thigh-slapping anticipation. After arriving home that night he reported—"Guess what, it only took till the fourth lesson". The girl in front turned around and snarled, "So, you're a Jesus freak!" I stared her right in the eye for a second then told her "You betcha, bring it on!" Somewhat shocked she conceded round one to our lad. Be bold!



A Digit/istock

VIEW FROM THE NATIONAL CHAIR

S H A N E K A M M E R M A N

Since occupying the position of National Chair I am gaining a clearer view of the life of the ACC. I offer the following perspectives to encourage you who are the ACC, and to help you know what is happening.

Our March National Council face-to-face gathering in Sydney was a significant time of review as we came together to consider the time ahead. Looking back over our “Vision and Goals 2007-2017”, we realised how much has happened, and were aware of the need to be realistic and hopeful about the future.

Personally I was again reminded that it is the Lord who has brought us this far, and we need to be listening for his voice as we face the sometimes perplexing days ahead. I offer the following personal reflections in the hope that together we might be encouraged and renewed in hope for the days to come.

Who are we?

A confessing movement is not so much a group that you support, but a movement of which you are a vital part. Your part includes prayer, financial contributions, participation in ACC events and gatherings as we “assemble”. Most important however, is our shared life as confessing Christians, who are part of Confessing Congregations, which are part of the Uniting Church in Australia. “We” are the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church of Australia, and we have a vital sharing in the life of our denomination into the future.

One of the questions sometimes directed to the leadership of the ACC is: What is ACC doing? Given what I have just noted about “we” being the ACC, a better question perhaps is “what is happening, and how are we involved in it locally and nationally?”

What are we doing?

Included in this edition of the magazine is a report from our National Council. In that report are a number of things that the ACC is doing. For example, you will read about the Assembly Doctrine Working Group’s discussion paper on the theology of marriage, and our Marriage Task Groups resources to help us respond to this important issue.

The marriage discussion paper has taken a long time to be released, perhaps due to some uncertainty of how it will be received by the Church?

Will feedback affirm the Assembly’s apparent desire for the UCA to continue down the road the ACC has called “apostate”? Will it elicit feedback that shows that indeed the UCA as a whole is not as liberal theologically as we might have been led to think? Will it be a source of further disunity and schism and the impetus for a rethink of how a number of groups within the UCA see their futures? Or will it be a big flop with little effect?

And as we await the outcome of this discussion paper and the compilation of feedback before the 2015 Assembly, it is not hard to be pessimistic. We have had discussion papers before! It all seems at times to be part of some sort of ethical assimilation policy.

Has anything changed since we began?

We have always held that the issues of sexuality were never isolated issues. Ethical issues are never separated from the nature of the Gospel, Church doctrine, evangelism and mission. I have heard people say “Let’s not worry about issues of sexuality, lets just get on with mission”. Others may

be accused of making so much ado about sexual issues that nothing else appears important. Both extremes miss the mark. The early church period was a time in many ways similar to our time when the church was called by the Lord Jesus to be his witnesses often as those persecuted, marginalised and misrepresented. It was also a time when the clear declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ shone like a bright light in the midst of darkness. What we can say, however, to the question of what are we doing, is this. We are actively engaged with the wider UCA and its councils as a confessing movement. We are standing firm in the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We are remaining in Christ and in his word in our everyday ministries. We are remaining within the UCA, understanding that we have a responsibility to our sisters and brothers to call them back to the Gospel. Part of this responsibility is to provide reformed/evangelical resources to the church, which we believe is an important part of our call as a confessing movement. Part is to confess clearly the truth of the word of God in the contexts in which we find ourselves.

So We Wait Actively.

Waiting actively is a strange and difficult space to live in. We don’t see the immediate results we would like. A confessing movement has no position of power within its denomination, it struggles financially, and most of its leaders juggle their time between local ministry and wider involvement.

But we know that the Lord of the Church has brought us here, that he has not left his Church, and that he will purify her by his judgments and his mercies. So be of good courage friends.

THE BENTLEY REPORT

The road to the assembly

Peter Bentley begins a series of reflections and comments in the lead-up to the next Assembly.

The 14th Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church National Assembly will meet in Perth from 12- 18 July 2015. The location is Winthrop Hall at the University of Western Australia and Trinity Residential College and Conference Centre. The President Elect is Stuart McMillan (from the Northern Synod) and his theme is Hearts on Fire!

The Assembly is made of members primarily elected or appointed by the Synods and Presbyteries. Very few people in the the Uniting Church will ever be a member and membership is a serious and somewhat onerous task and all other members of the UCA should pray for those attending the Assembly. I was a member of the perhaps now infamous 10th Assembly held in Melbourne in 2003 (remember Resolution 84?).

The numbers at an Assembly meeting vary, but many Assemblies have been ½ to 1/3 of some Synod meetings (though this is changing due to falling numbers attending Synods). The breakdown for membership is outlined fully in Regulation 3.3.8, but a summary is:

- one Minister and one confirmed lay member appointed by each Presbytery;
- Ministers and confirmed lay members appointed by the Synods, the total number appointed by each Synod being equal to the number appointed by its Presbyteries;
- ex-officio members – officers of the Assembly, UAICC
- and ‘other members’ – people appointed to fulfil certain categories.

The breakdown for Synod membership is interesting (2012 Regulations):

SYNOD	No.
NSW & ACT	54
NORTHERN	10
QUEENSLAND	36
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	38
VICTORIA & TASMANIA	58
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	20

What does the Assembly do?

The Assembly will receive and consider proposals and reports from other councils and agencies of the Uniting Church.

For its responsibilities, I still believe it is best to quote from the foundational uniting document: Basis of Union Paragraph 15 (e).

“It has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church’s mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church. It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church.”

Political speak

Any member who has attended a council of the church will know that there are terms and phrases that have taken on their own life and meaning. Before the 11th Assembly held in Brisbane in 2006, I provided a series of comments on political speak in the church. It is timely to re-visit some of the terminology and ideas again, some of which have now become part of the Uniting Church language.

Political Speak 1. “We need to live in the messy middle”

One of the main problems with the idea of the ‘messy middle’ is that very few people in church leadership actually live there, and some have not even visited the place, even though they may say it is a great place to be. Most people take sides, even if they say they do not. I was intrigued when a minister told me that he loved being in the ‘messy middle’, because I had noted that he had been more than happy to endorse a particularly

one-sided liberal proposal on sexuality at a Synod meeting. I believe it is more consistent for people who call others to live in the ‘messy middle’ to lead the way in abstaining in any debate on matters of defined policy, and certainly take no active part in the promotion of the more liberal alternatives in matters of sexual standards. Surely the only path for ‘messy middle’ people when confronted by proposals that call for a categorical position is to abstain. (*ReForming Newsletter* No. 11 December 2005)

Political Speak 2. “We (‘the liberal side’) do not caucus!”

An interesting reaction to evangelical gatherings for prayer, support and information over the last two years has been the response – “how dare you”, usually coupled with “we do not do these things”. One could probably argue that the liberal response is at least partly true, because when you have so much power you don’t need to overtly caucus.

If you already start with 20-25% of the votes at major councils of the church because of the number of paid employee representatives and co-options, then you have an excellent starting point for the first decision-making process.

When you add the present system of appointments which has a tendency to produce an ever-increasing theologically-liberal orientation as one moves toward the Assembly meeting, then you have an excellent foundation for directing the whole decision-making process.

In reality, however, many of the ‘theologically liberal’ members and groups in the church constantly caucus. It is sometimes termed ‘having coffee’, other times it is ‘a sharing meeting’, and some times it is ‘worship’. Rarely is a term such as ‘political meeting’ used, but the nature of politics makes the caucus a constant reality because of the experience and orientation of many overtly ‘theologically liberal’ members of the church toward political life. Everyone caucuses, and if you think you don’t then, you are in power. (From *ReForming Newsletter* No. 12, March 2006.)

Don died well

The good news preached at Don's funeral on Wednesday 30th July 2014 by Rod James

Strangely enough, the test of a meaningful life is dying well. John Wesley used to say of the early Methodists "Our people die well". And it was true that these Christians were known for the way they faced death with peace, joy and expectation.

I draw attention to this theme because I believe that Don Purdey died well. Indeed, his testimony has been widely used by God as he coped with motor neurone disease and stared down its most likely outcome. In 2012 he told the Uniting Church Synod,

"It is hard for me to finish my professional ministry so early. As a preacher and singer, to lose my ability to speak just seems wrong. It would be easy for me to be bitter. But I am determined, in God's power, to have it make me better. God is with me. I can honestly say that I feel closer to God now than ever."

That was nearly 2 years ago, and since then Don has maintained that disposition of faith, hope and love which has now enabled him indeed to die well.

Now the question is how can someone like you or me have confidence to die well?

As an old man in prison St Paul expressed this same confidence in the face of his own impending and violent death. He wrote to Timothy "...the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Now the question is how can someone like you or me have confidence to die well? There is, of course a false confidence in the face of death.

We live today in a careless age where most live in the delusion that they will never have to give account of the way they have lived their lives. And you could reassure yourself that you will never have to give an account in the afterlife for the way you have lived your life here.

But Jesus was at pains to warn us that that is not so. He said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matthew 12:36)

From the ACC

Don Purdey - a generous, humble and pastoral warrior.

It is with sadness we share with you that Rev. Don Purdey died suddenly on July 23, 2014. Don had been suffering from motor neurone disease for several years, and though still quite active this may have contributed to his sudden death.

Don was one of our confessing movement's long-serving and hard-working leaders. He had been State and National Chair of EMU and served on the National Council of both Reforming Alliance and ACC. He also served as a leader in Hope Mission Network in South Australia, and was the Secretary of ACC SA.

Don's most recent achievement in ACC was the design and implementation of the Emerging Leaders Award for young people in the Uniting Church. At the time of his death he was involved in the planning of the next ELA camp to be held in early 2015.

On behalf of ACC, the National Council expresses its deepest sympathies to Don's wife, Annette, and his family. We give thanks to God for the life of this his brave servant. "Well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your master."

Rod James, Secretary, ACC

St Paul told the Corinthians: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Alternatively, you may accept that there is accountability in death, but you may feel confident that you have done enough to please God with your own righteousness. You may say to yourself, "There are a lot worse people in the world than me."

The truth is that Jesus appeared on this earth to be our Saviour. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead he reconciled us to God and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in him. Those who, as Paul says, 'love his appearing', are those who have recognised that, as sinners, they need just such a Saviour as Jesus, and have received him with repentance and faith.

It is to these humble and penitent ones that God gives as a free gift, 'the crown of righteousness', i.e. the forgiveness of all of their sins, the cleansing of their consciences, and the purification of their lives through the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit bears witness to such a person that these things are so, then they have the confidence to die well.



Don Purdey at the 2013 ACC National Conference

But we can reject this great blessing. We can refuse to repent of our sins. We can reject Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. We can defy God's forgiveness of our sins. And we can resist new birth in the Holy Spirit. We can do all of this in order to continue as our own god and to get what we want out of life.

But, if we do that, we are a 'dead man walking' because we are not reconciled to our Creator and must face his judgement as one who has thumbed our nose at his grace. We stand to lose this world's treasures and we have no hope of an eternal inheritance. St Paul describes such a state as 'separated from Christ', a 'stranger to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world' (Ephesians 2:12).

By contrast, and this is surely the greatest contrast in the human situation, the one who believes in Christ "has passed from death to life". Jesus said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." John 5:24

You see, Don was able to die well because the Holy Spirit bore witness to him that he had already passed over from death to life. He knew therefore that when his mortal death came he would simply pass from life to LIFE.

Don was in the garden cutting a lovely rose when that moment came. His body was found on the ground, the rose was beside him. God had called him from life in Christ here to life with Christ there. That dear rose is on the sideboard in Don and Annette's home. It is wilting now, but Don is not wilting. He is blooming in the eternal garden of God.

Do you remember the breakfast cereal where the woman says "I'll have what she's having." If you know in your heart today that you do not have what Don is having, then let this day, when we say goodbye to Don, be the day when you say "Hello" to your heavenly father, the day when you pass over from death to life, the day when you know that you do have what Don is having, the day when you are ready to die well.

Please do not allow sin to harden your heart in stubborn refusal. You see, while sin weakens your willpower it strengthens your won't power. Ask your heavenly father to break down this mad resistance with his great love for you. Turn, and be reconciled to the One who knew you before you were born, the One who has brought you to this day that you might know his love and live in it forever.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Even today Jesus is saying,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Quotations are from the English Standard Version.

Don suggests

Hope Beyond Cure – a review from Rev Don Purdey

I did something I've never done before with a book, long or short – devoured it in one sitting! Bravo—you have brilliantly encapsulated the essence of faith and the reasons for belief in the midst of your own very powerful story. I can identify with everything—the grief, the groaning, and sense of loss, and the questioning—not just of God but of my own life and its worth. It's all brilliantly expressed and becomes a wonderful witness to our hope in Jesus.

So thanks—it's THE book I'll be recommending on sickness and finding hope.

(With permission from David McDonald: <http://hope-beyondcure.com>)

Hope Network

Our regular columnist Ian Clarkson recorded the following tribute for members of the SA Hope Network: Don was a faithful preacher and fine worship leader.

His addresses and sermons delivered over the period of his encroaching illness stirred and ministered deeply to many people.

We hope they may be digitised and made available to the public. Many recall his testimony and presentation at Synod as one of the most memorable of Synod moments.

Don ministered gently and clearly in the glorious orthodoxy of our faith. In recent times addressing the contemporary confusions on marriage and sexuality in society and even church he was both compassionate and unflinching as a pastoral warrior for truth. Amongst his colleagues and co-workers we remember him as a man of generosity and humility. (24 July 2014)

The most important thing

It's not quite speaking in tongues, but my voice sure doesn't sound the way it used to. People have trouble understanding me on the phone, and even face-to-face. Some of you would know that I used to love to lead worship with my voice and guitar. I can't sing anymore. I was a preacher. I don't preach anymore.

The reality is that I'm dying. Eighteen months ago I was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. Current medicine has no cure or effective treatment. Unless God intervenes, I will slowly lose control of my voluntary muscle movements – things like arm and leg movement, even breathing – until one day it will all be too much and I will die. The average life expectancy of MND sufferers is 27 months. I'm out to break the record, but the fact is, my clock is ticking.

And in my particular case, the disease has started in my tongue, so the first faculty I am losing is the ability to speak.

What it comes down to is this: I have a very limited capacity to speak into people's lives now. There isn't much time left for me to say the things I want to say. I have to choose my words carefully, and not waste them.

Have you wondered what you might say to someone you love if you thought you would not be able to add something else tomorrow? What would you choose to talk about?

I don't know what yours is, but here's mine.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loves you, personally, so much that he came into the world to teach you about God, to die for your own personal sins on his cross, and to rise from death to open a doorway for you through death into eternal life with him.

That's it. For those of you who know your Bibles it's very like John 3:16, isn't it? But that's what I want you to know. And not just to know it but to embrace it, celebrate it, and live out all that it means.

I wonder if you were in my shoes what you might do or say? And to whom? That's the other important question I want you to think about.

It's important stuff, so just in case you missed something, let me unpack it a little. There are four key statements.

1. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Did you take that in? Jesus is not just a great human teacher, like a lot of humanists, or followers of Confucius or Buddha would want you to accept. Jesus is God incarnate, God come to earth in human form. He proved he was God when he came to earth, fulfilling hundreds of prophecies.

2. Jesus loves you. We hear that statement so often in

the church that it's easy to forget just how important it is. Or maybe you're one of many people in the church who hear that phrase and hear the "you" as plural – that Jesus loves us all, which he does. So let me make it especially clear. Jesus loves you, singular. Even you. Even though you've messed up. Even despite the pain loving you may cause him. Jesus loves you. You personally. Especially you!

3. The death of Jesus paid for your sins. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul writes "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them".

It was God bearing the suffering. Some people try to separate Jesus from God, and therefore picture God in heaven callously sitting back and letting an innocent third party named Jesus bear all the pain. But Jesus was and is God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

4. Jesus' rising from death opened the door to eternal life. Jesus rising from the grave proved that he was and is God. He rose on that first Easter Day and he is still alive. He is God, and he is alive. And best of all, the pathway that he pioneered through death and into eternity is there for us all to follow. That was his promise in John 14—"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also."

I've already lost two brothers. One died of a brain tumour a few years ago—he was 64. But 29 years ago another brother died instantly in a glider crash at the age of 31. None of us can take tomorrow for granted.

You've read my important message. I wonder if you were in my shoes what you might do or say? And to whom? That's the other important question I want you to think about. Because the truth is, you are in my shoes. None of us can make assumptions about what life might hold in store.

In all the stories that emerge from people's deathbeds, not one of them is lying there wishing they had spent more time at the office. Everyone, when it comes to those final hours, wants to spend them among the people they love, and they're lying there hoping that by their living they have conveyed to those loved ones something lasting; something that will outlive them; something that will resonate and help those people in their own journey through life.

As I have confronted the fact of my own mortality, I've come to the conclusion that I want to say the most important things I can to as many people as I can before I run out of time. That's really why I'm writing like this.

Friends, whatever your gifts and skills in life, whatever stage of life you're at, whatever other agendas you have running: the most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most powerful, the most exciting legacy you can leave with your family and friends—and the most urgent and important thing you have to talk to them about – is a love for Jesus Christ. If I'm right, are you following Jesus? And if you are following him, ask yourself this: Is my life's purpose and priority given to sharing that good news with those I know and love?

Death of an Ex

Terry Cunningham on saying goodbye when you are divorced and death is not natural

It's just a few weeks since I said "goodbye" to my wife of many years. As I placed my hand on her casket, I remembered the intelligent, funny, quirky, generous woman who shared my faith and life. My wife had struggled with a long-standing health problem and finally lost the battle. Peace at last.

But alongside these fond memories and natural grief at losing someone precious is something darker.

It was during a period of growing mental distress that my wife decided she could not cope with marriage and insisted we separate. Three years later we divorced.

And then there was the fact that this was no natural death. Despite her love for Jesus, she had taken her own life during an episode of severe depression and altered logic. As a family, we are in shock. And now we grieve.

Immediately after Anne's death, the 'if only' questions ran riot. As a pastor and a father, I have tried to help grown-up children understand the sovereignty of God in these confronting, confusing circumstances. There were the usual questions: "Does a Christian who takes their life lose their salvation?" and "Is suicide an unforgivable sin?" But shock brings up some strange questions also. A son: "I should have given her that flat screen TV she wanted. Maybe that would have stopped her?" A female friend and pastor: "If only I had had a coffee with her. Maybe then..?" And I asked myself if making another phone call during the holiday weekend might have changed anything.

But there are no satisfactory answers—not in this world anyway.

Because of divorce, Anne's family and I have had to negotiate the awkwardness of 'immediate' and 'second-tier' family involvement in the funeral.

There were also theological minefields to be negotiated with other Christians and fellow ministers.

Generally, conservatives focused on the seriousness of suicide-sin and divorce-sin before moving to a position of grace, while liberals focused God's easy-going acceptance—to the point of being trite.

Neither of these positions properly honour God. Neither really helps an Ex and their family deal with the death of an ex-partner or the loss of a loved-one to suicide. Of course, suicide and divorce are serious matters—and God is very gracious and accommodating through difficult times.

It's tempting to go for the 'middle ground' between these two positions – taking a kind of 'median' position. But for those wondering how to minister to an Ex and their family, I suggest with some personal experience

that the best course is to keep the theological balance, not a theological average.

Fortunately, most of my friends took a justice-and-mercy perspective on God's nature. They were neither overly legalistic nor overly permissive. They also did not hold to a middle-ground 'concessionist' position (a sort of yin-yang balancing act of good and evil). The authentic Christian faith acknowledges both the full horror of sin and the full extent of God's grace—a total overlap. Why? Because God's authority extends over every situation, not merely some.

Jesus says knowing the Father and the Son is eternal life—and that remaining plugged into him as our life source is both a reassurance for this life and an assurance for eternity.

Religion won't get you into that space. Legalism won't. Permissiveness won't. Concessionism won't. The torment of depression and its mind-altering, judgement-warping effects does not change that fact. The grieving Ex needs to be reminded that God is both just and merciful. Not simply one or the other or a reductionist amalgam of the two.

Anne's death was a strong reminder that the only basis for our salvation is a personal trusting relationship in Jesus Christ. The central reassurance was that, when all was said and done, this relationship overwhelmed any inadequacies or failures. We all fail. The Gospel message was front-and-centre in Anne's funeral—and not as a platitude or whitewash for reality. People were saved that day by the testimony of her life.

Which brings me to my main point. Do not assume that an Ex is immune from grief simply because he/she is separated or divorced. In fact, an Ex is often deeply connected and deeply affected. Grief is not limited to those still married at the time of death.

Divorced at a funeral

The death of an ex-spouse raises wrenching questions. Do you attend the funeral for closure, or stay home out of respect for the current partner if there is one? What is the proper condolence? And how do you cope with what experts term "double death"—as a former lover passes, so does the hope of rescinding past hurts for reconciliation. This may be so even where divorce has occurred.

"There's no real protocol. When it comes to attending the funeral, you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't," grief psychologist Harold Smith says. "You're damned if you don't show up, and potentially judged to not be sincere."

LEFT BEHIND

“It’s disenfranchised grief. If you’re an Ex, you just don’t get fully recognised as a griever, regardless of how the relationship ended,” he said.

Mr Smith recalled one funeral in which an ex-wife and new girlfriend walked down the church aisle behind the man’s casket, holding hands. “That could not have happened 10 years ago.”

For exes, there are ways to “ritualise your loss” other than throwing yourself on the casket. “There’s the option of going late, sitting in the back and leaving before the service is over. There will be people who will say you paid your respects, you were there. Or, go sign the guestbook, express your condolences and then leave.” If relations are frosty, there is the possibility of mourning alone, “with candles, or some kind of litany, or readings.” Always consider the children.

“It’s important to understand that when death follows divorce, people experience a ‘loss-upon-loss,’” professional counsellor, Marty Tousley, says.

“I don’t know the circumstances of your divorce or whether you and your ex-spouse had resolved the death of your marriage. What I can tell you is that the reactions you may be having (shock, sadness, loss, ambivalence) are not at all unusual when an ex-spouse dies.

“You are in an ambiguous role: although you are no longer married to this man, he’s still the father of your children and your relationship with him is still significant, if only for that reason alone.

“Because you have no legal access to medical information, you may not feel fully informed about the nature and circumstances of his death and, when you attended his funeral, you may have felt left out or very out of place.

“In a situation such as this, your friends don’t know what to say or how to respond, they may not be very helpful or supportive, and they may say some very insensitive things to you. Since you cannot publicly mourn this death without explaining your divorce, you may be reluctant to seek spiritual support. If you’re employed outside your home, certainly your employer will not give you time off from work for this, which only adds to your sense of disenfranchisement, as if you have no ‘right’ or reason to grieve this loss.

“I say all of this to you in an effort to help you recognize that a real loss in fact has occurred here, and it is normal for you to be reacting with real grief. Certainly not every ex-spouse will experience the same reactions; there are many variables that will shape anyone’s response to loss. Nevertheless, since typically ex-spouses have such limited social, familial and spiritual support, you may find it very helpful to vent your feelings in the supportive and non-judgmental environment that a grief support group or a few sessions with a bereavement counsellor would provide. I recommend seeking group support for your boys. But keep in mind that the best way to help your children with their grief is for you to take care of your own.”

“Even in the stormiest, most destructive divorce, there are still feelings for the person who used to share your bed and your life,” Lee Banner (Alabama Law Center) says. “And in the midst of grieving over the loss of my divorced spouse, I’m also grieving over the relationship as I wish it could have been.”

Borden goes on to suggest that the loss of an ex-spouse actually hurts more, “because I’m forced to go back and relive the cruddy experience of my divorce and the unhap-

piness that led up to it.” Yes, it is bitter and sweet.

Nor does the ex-spouse usually get calls from friends, bouquets of flowers or a smorgasbord of food as the community arrives to pay respect for your loss. Usually it is silence, and you grieve alone. A part of your history has died.

In a situation such as this, your friends don’t know what to say or how to respond, they may not be very helpful or supportive, and they may say some very insensitive things to you. Since you cannot publicly mourn this death without explaining your divorce, you may be reluctant to seek spiritual support.

People may think they’re breaking free of marriage when they leave but history has a way of putting invisible handcuffs on you and tying you to that relationship forever when you have children.

Surviving the suicide death of a spouse

It has been said that suicide is like a grenade going off within a family or community, according to the Alliance of Hope, which addresses the experiences of those who lose a partner or family member through suicide.

In the aftermath, survivors are left profoundly wounded and deeply distressed, the organisation says. Many grapple with debilitating emotions, altered relationships, and challenging responsibilities. Each situation is unique, but some issues are commonly shared by survivors.

“Research tells us that it is helpful to know about common survivor reactions. Being informed does not make the reactions disappear. That will take time - and probably a good deal of grief-work. It will help though to know that what you are feeling is commonly felt by other survivors and that it is possible to survive and go beyond just surviving,” Alliance of Hope says.

“In the aftermath of suicide, many survivors express doubt about previously held beliefs. Some question their relationship to God, religion or their spiritual community. Some find themselves angry: ‘God, how could you allow this to happen?’ Others find comfort in their religion and the support of their faith community.

In the aftermath of suicide, survivors feel many strong emotions - sometimes moving from one to another fairly rapidly. Anger is an integral part of the traumatic and complicated grief process. Invariably survivors feel guilty or conflicted when they do experience anger. “Yesterday was a good day. Last night was horrible. This morning I just feel sick to my stomach and I want to crawl in a hole.”

Sadness, depression and despair are common and almost inevitable following the loss of a loved one by suicide. In the beginning, survivors are not in control of their emotions. Pain is so great that it is difficult for many to find hope or envision a future that holds any happiness.

Most survivors say that until they experienced this kind of loss, they had no idea that pain could be so deep. Because the pain is so great, many survivors have thoughts about ending their own lives. Sometimes they think that will allow them to join their loved ones.

Loss by suicide is traumatic. The grief experienced is unlike any other. It commonly leaves people with very real invisible wounds. Their bodies go on hyper-alert. Their serotonin levels plunge. They are left with debilitating symptoms of depression as well as post-traumatic stress that lasts longer than expected.

It is wise to seek professional help. The ministry of a church can be to walk alongside those walking the grief path. Survivors, including Exes, do not have to travel this journey alone.

In the beginning survivors wonder if they will ever experience joy or contentment again. People do survive loss by suicide and even eventually go beyond simply surviving to once again having happy, meaningful and contributory lives, but surviving is not easy.

Beneath all the feelings of shock, guilt, anger and grief, there is an underlying love that survivors have for the one who has departed. It hurts so much because we loved them so much.

“The love of my life shot herself. I’ve never been a religious person, not even a spiritual person. However, I’ve found myself talking to her on a daily basis, telling her that I love her and how sorry I am for everything.”

“I sat awhile at the grave site. I don’t cry when I go there anymore. If it’s possible, I think I am cried out. But I talk to him and tell him I love him.”

A suicide creates an immediate and gaping hole in the hearts and lives of survivors. Aftershock may reverberate long after the funeral is over.

Baylor University’s School of Social Work notes that ‘Uncomplicated Mourning’ can be expected to last two to three years, while ‘Complicated Mourning’ may last five to seven years. While friends and mourners return to their everyday lives, those closest to the deceased often struggle with painful emotions for a long time.

For many survivors, personal relationships become severely strained. For some, it becomes a struggle to leave the house and go out into the world. At times, it may be no easier to stay home with one’s family.

Survivors frequently suffer additional pain when they seek support from family, friends, neighbours, or community organisations and these individuals are unable to deal sensitively with what has happened. Whether intentional or unintentional, this lack of support has a profound impact on survivors who are already raw with grief and guilt. Worse, some survivors report feeling “blamed” by those they approached for support. Also, secondary wounding can occur in a number of ways:

1. Denial and Disbelief. When survivors talk about the suicide or subsequent events to others and they are not fully understood or believed.

2. Discounting or Minimising: When the pain of survivors is dismissed and they are made to feel that there is something wrong with them. Some survivors are told it is “time to get over it”.

3. Blaming Survivors: When people communicate overtly or covertly: “Well, maybe if you hadn’t ... “You should have never ... “That’s what you get for”

4. Treating survivors or loved one as defective or dysfunctional.

These are all ways of making survivors think that they do not have a right to their pain. The grief from suicide is painful and the healing journey can be long. Survivors have a right to mourn in their own time and in their own way. In the meantime, we should respect ‘Survivor Rights’. A survivor has the right to:

- Know the truth about the suicide;
 - Consider suicide as the result of several interrelated causes that produced unbearable pain for the deceased: suicide is not really a free choice;
 - Live wholly, with both joy and sorrow, free from stigma or judgment;
 - Have his/her privacy respected;
 - Find support from relatives, friends, and colleagues - and from professional helpers who have knowledge and insight in the dynamics of bereavement, and potential risks;
 - Be contacted by the clinician/caregivers (if any) who treated the deceased;
 - Not automatically be considered a ‘suicide risk’ or ‘patient’;
 - Place one’s experience in the service of other survivors;
- (Source: Flemish Working Group on Suicide Survivors).

The Flemish Working Group on Suicide Survivors says things will never be the same. There is a before-suicide life and a post-suicide life. But Christian counsellors note that God is able to work powerfully through all these circumstances.

Survivors inevitably search for a reason, perhaps in an attempt to gain some level of control in a seemingly unpredictable world. Trying to understand the “why” can occupy survivor minds for a long time. Ultimately many realize they may never know.

Alliance of Hope for Suicide Survivors says that when survivors talk about their loved ones, it becomes evident that there is no one path or cause for suicide.

Each story is unique. Some who take their lives have struggled long and hard with previously diagnosed mental illnesses such as Bi-Polar Disorder, Depression, Schizophrenia or Borderline Personality Disorder.

Others have never been diagnosed, but in hindsight, had many traits that fit these diagnoses. Some have spoken of suicide at various points in their lives. Others never gave any indication of depression. Some suicides appear to be impulsive following a significant disappointment. Others seem more-planned. Many people who take their lives have alcohol or drugs in their system. Others do not. Some leave notes. Others do not.

It appears that each person who dies by suicide has reached a point where they can no longer tolerate their pain and suffering. Most don’t intend to leave behind a wake of pain and destruction. They are simply searching for a way out of an unbearable struggle.

Answering God's call

Pastor Grant Jewell reflects on his ministry service

Birkenhead (U. K.) is to Liverpool, what Birkenhead (S.A.) is to Port Adelaide— industrial, wharf, shipping, trade, trains and trucks. The Birkenhead Methodist Church was the spiritual home of a number of (willing) lads especially in the 1950's and 1960's. You could see the docks from the front porch of the church. I was one of those lads.

Having been brought up in the faith at that church, I was struggling as a teenager with the notion of "gentle Jesus meek and mild". I had recently joined the Customs Service, and was finding my "way". One morning I was doing cargo check when I walked into a shed, and there, sitting on a chest of tea was Rev. John Crossley (Revcros to the boys). A group of stevedores had gathered around him, and as they sipped their mugs of tea and enjoyed a rollic, a lively discussion was underway. I went about my work and returned to the office. But I knew then that I could "do" what Revcros was doing. Rev. John Halliwell Crossley was a working man's Methodist, a servant of Jesus and we loved him.

Not long after another man Rev. Edgar Miller said to me one Sunday after church, "young man, you need to come to the manse tomorrow evening". There he said "I feel led to tell you, God expects you to be a preacher", and so it was. I was 17.

Many years later taking early retirement, and having spent a few years at evening class at Parkin Wesley College. I heard God's call to ministry, and asked to be acknowledged as a pastor. It had to be country ministry, usually difficult to fill places. There were many of them as we went into an interim ministry at varying levels of stipend. Bordertown, Balaklava, Minlaton, Peterborough, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Owen, Bordertown (again). At first it concerned me that a city bloke could minister to country folk. But they just love whoever comes (even me), and I found that my upbringing around the docks had similarities with those who had found their childhood in the paddocks. On one occasion

I was responding to a call to a small town to a blended church (Church of Christ and UCA), so I started to read up on the Church of Christ. How could I minister unless I understood? Then on our first day in town a few locals came to the manse to welcome Lin and me as country folk do. Amongst them was the leader of the Church of Christ component of the congregation. I told him of my fears, and efforts to learn (I'm a life long learner, but no academic) He said "We don't care" — "we have called you to be our pastor—that is it".

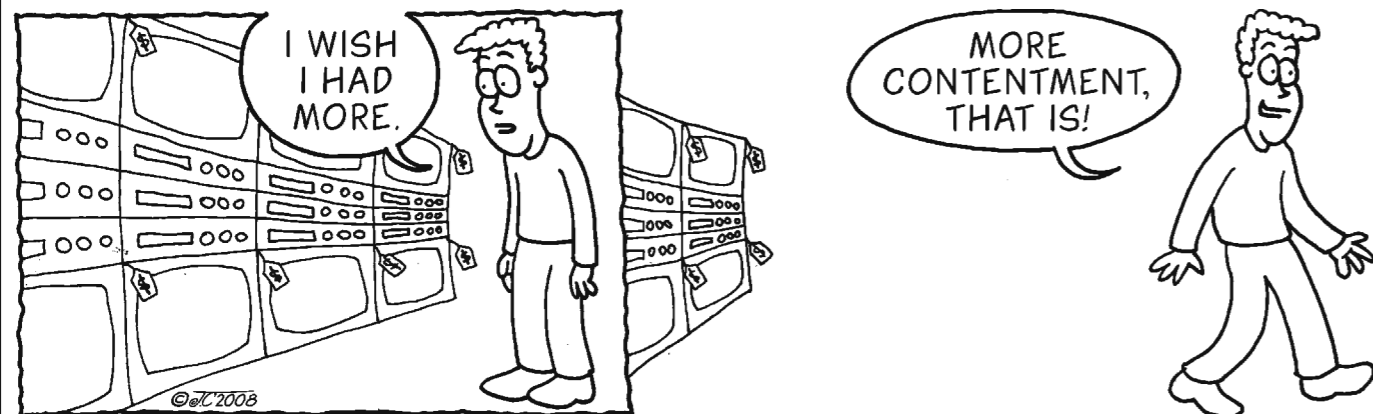
How liberating, how trusting. It's that kind of trust that compels us to be servants (Mark 9:33–36) of the body of Christ. Maybe, having spent all my life in an environment where not trusting was almost a given, it was quite a change.

One of the really great things about country ministry was the variety of possibilities I found coming across my path. The radio segment roster, Christian Comment in the local paper, and in cases where you are the only minister in town the challenge to be relevant to many traditions in times of grief and loss (here I found my "Lifeline" experience invaluable). A knock on the manse door could be anything—a call from the roadhouse up on the highway likewise.

Speaking of the roadhouse, one last anecdote. It was evening and many truckies had pulled in for tea. I wandered through the dining area, saying quietly "Local pastor, anyone care for a chat". Sure sometimes I heard "B..... off" etc, but on one occasion—"why don't you get a coffee and sit down, its been a rough day". Later at the manse I heard about unpaid bills, a wife who was fed up, truck payments overdue ... memories of the 'Nam etc. That's the ministry that keeps me alive, and reminds me of the servant nature of the call.

I don't think we go to tell, inform, educate, or politicise. For us as all things come to those who serve. And how rich that is! We give thanks for a wonderful twelve years of country pasturing!

Grant Jewell is an ACC member and now a retired pastor, though not retired from serving the Lord.



A vision of Mobile ministry

Most agree that we need to do things differently from the way we do ministry within our congregations. The current focus within the UCA has been on resourcing lay ministry teams. This is commendable, it is necessary, but is it the only model or do we need more?

Rev Grahame & Fran Abrahams have invested in a different model that focuses on short-term support for congregations without 'ordained ministry'. They spent their retirement funds on purchasing a 5th Wheeler motor home so they could spend a month with a congregation giving some respite to the lay leaders who are carrying a large burden within the UCA.

Grahame said this ministry is not trying to reinvent what is currently happening in the wider church in resourcing lay ministry teams. Grahame and Fran are focusing on what they have termed "Pastoral Mission".

With the church experiencing declining numbers, we need to reinvent models of mission, resourcing helps churches to continue on the same model of church, but without a mission focus which comes from pastoral sensitivity there will not be any real growth.

Grahame and Fran realised they could not do this on their own, and the Shellharbour Village Uniting Church have blessed their ministry and sent them out, providing prayer and moral support that holds the ministry accountable to the church.

This ministry has inspired a vision within the members of the Illawarra Presbytery who have also blessed the ministry sending Grahame and Fran out with prayer and the laying on of hands.

Currently the Abrahams are working with four congregations in W.A. for three and a half months. After only one month one adult has been baptised and another is considering baptism.

Two of the congregations that are 60kms in the opposite direction from Wagin, have never had a resident minister in all their history and have only had fortnightly services



At one town we pulled into, people were waiting in the caravan park to invite us to their home for afternoon tea and a chat, before we were even unpacked—we clearly see the need for this type of ministry.

and fleeting visits from ministers who have had to travel long distances, unable to have a more concentrated ministry.

The mobile unit is able to be taken to these towns for a week or more at a time, and is able to reach out to many more people.

Here are some comments from the people ministered to:

It is obvious that your stay in Darkan was very successful. I do feel the "one on one" with people has worked very, very well....is lovely to have such alive Christians in our midst and everyone is saying how very nice you both are, your idea of the van and visiting is wonderful and people have made very favourable comments. (Elders, Darkan WA)

Although the ministry unit was only able to spend one week in the town of Darkan, the fact that we stayed in the town made a tremendous difference as to the focus and impact of the ministry.

They weren't getting the leftovers

from another town, the focus even for a short time was on them and that made a difference to the impact of the ministry.

"This ministry has exceeded our expectations." (Chair of Wagin Church Council)

"Grahame and Fran were received through Prayer and anticipation of God fulfilling a need in our Parish. Their very positive and active participation in the life of the church and individuals—through visiting all on the rolls with a freshness and listening ear has been very encouraging. Apart from the welcome relief for the local preachers, the Elders have been encouraged, challenged and refocused.

"Affirmation of the Biblical gospel has inspired us to grow on in Christ." (Chair of Wagin Elders)

Grahame and Fran say the reception in these four congregation has been overwhelming and rewarding as they see lives touched as they visit many people within the four communities.

Grahame said, "At one town we pulled into, people were waiting in the caravan park to invite us to their home for afternoon tea and a chat, before we were even unpacked—we clearly see the need for this type of ministry."

There is a cost in keeping this ministry on the road, registration, insurance, phones, maintenance and repairs etc.

If you feel led to help with this ministry donations can be made directly to the Abrahams or through the Shellharbour Village Uniting Church.

If you wish to have this ministry visit your congregation contact Grahame & Fran on 0429995649 or email gka004@gmail.com

Healing today?

I empathise with Dr. Browne's dilemmas (July 2014 *ACCatalyst*) in regard to the Healing ministry and why many who are prayed for are not healed. But I wonder in the end if she is still able to affirm that God intervenes to bring miraculous healing today?

Cecil Murphey in a recent book "I Believe in Healing", used a word 'recrudescence' to describe our hopes for the demonstrations of healing we long to see more often in the church of this day. The word describes a dormant volcano inexplicably bursting into life ... when God so chooses.

For example, healings, revival and renewal that impact not just the church but the culture around it. For that day we all hope and pray.

Mr Williams' article (July 2013 *ACCatalyst*) was an affirmation of that expectation that he has applied to his life over many years.

As someone who has wrestled with questions similar to Dr Browne's over many years, I have come to the conclusion that our constant questions about the healing ministry, are never going to be resolved in the here and now.

While we praise God for the wonderful things medicine is doing for us, it must always be secondary to the intervention of Gods power for the healing process to be complete.

Such a hope has its basis in the Cross of Christ and the compassionate nature of God to rid this world of sickness and disease. Of course we maintain such a hope in a pastorally sensitive way alongside a realistic affirmation of the sovereignty of God over all the circumstances of our lives.

In order to maintain a positive attitude to the Healing ministry in the local church today we need to affirm the positives of Gods intervention medically and spiritually in our lives, instead of nurturing the attitude that constantly tries to rationalise why God heals in some cases yet seems not to in others.

Allan C George (Rev)

A wave of Methodist disobedience

Good News, an evangelical magazine within the United Methodist Church reports on a trail of Bishops and Clergy disregarding Church Discipline around gay marriage.

"Some progressive clergy, contrary to the Book of Discipline, have presided at same-sex marriage services. Many have not been charged, and in at least two instances, bishops declined to hold the offending clergy accountable.

"An inconsequential 24-hour suspension was given in one case and the charges were simply dismissed in the other case.

"Several bishops have publicly declared their intention to avoid any future trials. For the leading pastors and theologians, an important line had been crossed. Progressive clergy and bishops across the connection were, as they had previously warned, now openly and collectively disregarding parts of the Book of Discipline in the practice of their ministries."

The Liberal parts of the Church are frustrated that repeated attempts to change the conservative marriage rules within the Book of Discipline have failed. The United Methodist Church includes African conferences of churches in addition to its United Staes base—the African votes plus the conservatives in the US conferences form an unshakeable majority.

But the disobedience tactic has frustrated United Methodist evangelicals within the USA. A group of evangelical ministers are proposing "amicable separation" from the United Methodist Church.

Good News reports "The Rev. Tom Harrison, pastor of Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and one of the pastors considering amicable separation, said, "Two groups are locked in diametrically opposed positions . . . [and] the conflict has escalated to the point where one group is breaking the covenant which binds us together. A new path must be found."

Liberal groups have put forward plans for "local option" which would allow local conferences to override the Book of Discipline and allow

gay marriages. Another group have proposed a "network" solution where conservative churches and liberal churches would form parallel jurisdictions.

The President of the conservative Ashbury Seminary believes that a quick fix to the gay marriage issue will not solve the Church's real problems which relate to the deeper issues of Biblical Authority and the loss of a "distinctively Christian consciousness"

Presbyterians vote for gay marriage

The Presbyterian Church in the USA voted to allow their pastors to preside over same sex marriages in states where it is legal at their General Assembly in July.

Conservative churches continue to leave the PCUSA. MenloPark Presbyterian in San Francisco, with 4,000 members paid the local presbytery \$8.9m to leave with its buildings in early 2014.

Menlo Park like many other churches that have left, voted to join the Evangelical Covenant Order (ECO), a new group of Presbyterian churches. Highland Park Presbyterian Church, another Texas megachurch of about 4,000 members left last year, also for ECO.

ECO ordains women, and is a softer alternative than more traditionalist groups like the Presbyterian Church of America.

PCUSA is losing 60,000 members a year according to its own statistics.

NZ ex-Anglicans talk to Gafcon

Gafcon (Global Anglican Futures Conference) a network of confessing Anglicans is in talks with a breakaway NZ congregation.

The Rev. Michael Hewat, the former vicar of West Hamilton Anglican Church has been in discussion about receiving alternative "episcopal oversight" George Conger of the Anglican Ink website, reports.

In May the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand voted to begin a process of authorising gay marriage.

The Woman at the Well

It gave no sign, nor signal
Of the day that lay ahead
The sun, again as always
Rose slowly on my bed.

I felt no strange sensation
No eager surge of hope
Just the usual anguish
And the pain to live and cope.

"The harlot of Samaria"
"You hussy!" yelled a brother
"She's been through husband number five
And now she seeks another".

The jeers, all too familiar
And shame? My second skin
A life of promise, turned to dust
And bonded fast to sin.

But something different came this day
A sweet, yet strange delight
The words of one who spoke my name
And gave my eyes new sight.

As I neared old Jacob's well
I saw a Jew there resting,
He looked at me—I turned away
And feared a time of testing.

The journey to the well is hard
The midday sun is shocking
But by that time, the girls have gone
And with them go their mocking.

"Woman" said the weary man
"Will you give me some water?"
Amazed I said "But you're a Jew!"
And I, your foes own daughter".

"If you knew the gift of God
And who it is who asks
You would ask me for a drink
A drink that heals and lasts.

And I would gladly give it
To you and to all men
This drink of living water
Where you'll never thirst again".

Things quite strange and wonderful
Were spoken by this Jew
But when he told me of my past
I knew that God was true.

"Go and get your husband"
He said with gentle eyes
"A husband Lord? I haven't one"
This shame, it never dies!

"Its true you have no husband
But five men you have carried
And now the one who shares your bed
Remains with you, unmarried".

But even as he said these words
With love that seared my soul
I knew this man, he knew my pain
And he could make me whole.

I ran back to my village
No longer filled with fear
I shouted out "I've seen the Christ!
The one of God is here!".

He told me everything I've done
My guilt and wrong behaviour
But gave me grace instead of shame
And showed himself —My Saviour.

The days have past since Jesus came
And set this captive free
Who'd have thought this man of God
Would die upon a tree.

But in his death a victory call
Was heard above the din
That God himself has died our death
And made himself our sin.

No guilt, no fear will hold us now
That God has born our pain
In him we have been given grace
And cause to smile again

And what of sin—the taunter still
Our cruel yet former chief
He has no purchase on us now
For Christ has bought relief.

He moved us from sin's kingdom
To a realm of God and grace
Where heads now lifted up with joy
Can look upon God's face.

AHHH the sweetest taste of rest,
A broken heart now healed.
Because of Christ, my Lord, my hope
my life, my joy, my shield.

By Simon Dent

Rev. Simon Dent is the minister at Coromandel Valley Uniting Church, SA

Living with twins

Although I have been associated with the church my whole life, I was saved at the age of sixteen. My Christian life has been characterised by two strong, but often contradictory, influences. Since my new birth, I have attended Liverpool Uniting Church. The church has always had a strong emphasis on prayer, worship and the prophetic. At this church, I've attended a young adults' service that owed much of its structure to Hillsong. In my first year of uni, still an infant in Christ, I also became involved in the Macquarie Uni AFES fellowship. This group excelled in solid expository Bible teaching and equipping university students to share the gospel on campus and beyond.

As a young Christian, I spent many hours thinking about (and even worrying about) how these two traditions—the charismatic and the evangelical—could fit together. Often what I heard or experienced in one of my groups would be downplayed or outright denied by the other. Having spiritual roots in both traditions, too many times I've observed one criticising the other and viewing it with deep suspicion. In some rare but unfortunate cases, they even question whether the other tradition is Christian at all.

Much of this suspicion comes from a desire to avoid the extremes of false teaching. This is an honourable desire. However, when avoiding the extremes—the dry, passionless ex-



The Hillsong Conference 2012

Peter Bentley

perience of the extreme evangelical or the extreme charismatic's lack of regard for the authority of Scripture—we do not need to reject everything the tradition offers. As I am maturing in my faith, I am coming to see the value in a balance of both charismatic and evangelical. We are called to be discerning, to wisely consider what these traditions offer and measure everything against Biblical truth.

There is another way, though, rather than simply discarding that which is unbiblical. In each tradition, there is great beauty. By finding the beauty in each, we are left with something incredibly deep that brings great joy. There is beauty in the charismatic tradition in worshipping God with, as Hillsong's song *The Stand* has

put it, 'arms high and heart abandoned, in awe of the one who gave it all' (Joel Houston, 2006). Beauty in the evangelical tradition can be found in the steadfast commitment to Scriptural, expository preaching. Imagine if those two things existed side by side in a church, ever growing deeper.

I have only focused on two traditions, those that have been influential in my life. But, there are many expressions of the Christian faith—each with their extremes and with their beauty. As Paul said to the Thessalonians, we must test everything and hold on to the good. May we not only hold on to the good, but wholeheartedly embrace it.

Bella Hibbard, ACC Liverpool UC Member

Freedom

From page 20
their neighbours. One key scene for me however illustrated vividly an example of poor secular interpretation today. The film was subtitled and in a family devotional scene where the father clearly says the resurrection of Jesus, the subtitle states this as resuscitation – an editing point of 'neo-liberal persuasion' that clearly makes a statement in contrast to that of the film in general.

The Overnighters (2014)

The Overnighters is a fascinating and somewhat disturbing documentary following a recent two year period in Williston, North Dakota when job hunters come seeking a job lured by the thought of mines and good pay. Of course few end up with good prospects, and many need a place to stay. The Lutheran pastor, Jay Reinke, allows the men to sleep in the church, or camp in the carpark and some stay in his home with his family. Issues develop within the church, especially over the increasing dominance of the

ministry, and also within his family and sadly the pastor himself has a homosexual liaison, ending the ministry and the good works that had begun. One redeeming feature of the eventual sad state of affairs is that this Pastor actually names his sin for what it is – adultery. How refreshing – rather than telling how he had found the love of his life and simply had to break his vows and follow his leanings, he at least acknowledges what he had done and laments the impact on his wife and family.

Peter Bentley

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 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/>

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

What happens next

● September 11-13: 2014 AGM and Conference: at Naamaroo Conference Centre, Chatswood.

● September 19: Cranbourne Cluster meeting (Contact office for details)

● September 21: 2 pm ACC Hunter Cluster meeting at Booragul UC, Newcastle.

● October 9: Robert Iles Lecture: 'The Importance of Marriage' by The Hon. Kevin Andrews: Burnside City Church, Adelaide.

● October 12: ACC Waverley Cluster meeting, Melbourne

● November 17: ACC National Council meeting

ACC Resources List

All ACC resources (except the DVD resources) are available on the ACC Website: www.confessingcongregations.com

A selection of ACC DVD and video resources including the 2012 Conference presentations are available on vimeo; eg., Max Champion introducing the ACC: <http://vimeo.com/53983980> A limited range of earlier material is still published in Disc form, and all ACC Congregations have received ACC DVD resource material for their use.

Founding Documents

The Charter (2006)
Statement on Sexuality (2006)
Confessing Statement from the Executives of the Reforming Alliance and Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church (EMU) (2006)

ACC Brochures and Statements

ACC Vision and Goals 2007-2017 (2008)
Cross Cultural Commission Statement (2008)
The Church's Social Responsibility (2008)

Theological Declaration (2008)
Theological Declaration: Commentary and Study Guide (2009)

Abortion in the Australian Community (2010)

A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide (2011)

Marriage: An ACC Statement (2011)

Bible Studies

Bible Study: Mark ISBN 978-0-9804493-0-3

Bible Study: Galatians ISBN 978-0-9804493-1-0

Faith That Works: Studies in the Letter of James ACC Bible Study No. 3. Brian Edgar (2008) ISBN 978-0-9804493-2-7

DVD Resources

Conversations Series
No. 1 Conversations in Discipleship and Evangelism: A Study Guide with DVD (2010) ISBN 978-0-9804493-3-4

No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

No. 3 This is Love: A Study Guide with DVD (2012) ISBN 978-0-9804493-8-9

Devotional Booklets

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 1 (2011)
– Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-5-8

Seeds For Harvesting Vol. 2 (2012)
– Rev Robert Imms ISBN 978-0-9804493-7-2



Cuba Goodings as escaping slave Samuel Woodward

Songs of Freedom

Freedom (2014, M).

Freedom (or as it was originally known *Carry Me Home*) is a film intimately related to the tradition of the 2007 film *Amazing Grace*. *Amazing Grace* was one of the first films reviewed by ACCatalyst when we started in 2007 and the poster graced our second cover.

Freedom stands more firmly in the Christian film tradition, especially as it was filmed in the USA (Connecticut) and is clearly aimed at a certain market.

Musical theatre actor and Australian actor and presenter Peter Cousins is the director—his first film, clearly a labour of love, and a worthy effort. He would be well-known to Australian audiences from many musicals and television shows and he uses his musical theatre background in a variety of ways in the film, overseeing the many well-known spiritual songs and laterally connecting a musical acting troupe and the anti-slavery movement.

Freedom has two intertwined stories, connected by a bible and slavery. Virginian Slave, Samuel Woodward, is played by US actor Cuba Gooding Jr. Samuel leads his family to escape using the Underground Railroad—a network of anti-slavery workers—many Christians, especially Quakers, who provided safe passage for slaves to the north and to Canada.

The other story develops the

Amazing Grace theme through John Newton as the slave trader, and connects with the second period as among his cargo of slaves on one trip was Samuel’s great grandfather. As readers and singers will know John Newton’s life was eventually changed and this *Amazing Grace* is experienced by others in the film too.

The film itself is partly a musical as there are times when the actors break into song, but it is mainly a drama and is mostly well acted and made, though could have been helped by a tighter script, and some further editing, and also deletion of some visual effects in favour of the simple storyline. The songs are memorable and quite moving. I personally found the star of the movie to be the singer Jubilant Sykes, who plays the slave translator Ozias. After taking up the film’s kind offer of downloading four songs, I played *City Called Heaven* on a continuous loop while I was thinking about and writing my review.

Go and see this film, or buy the DVD when it comes out and invite some friends to view and discuss. It has a warm heart and addresses some serious issues and is part of the increasing world-wide campaign to recognise and address the continuing slavery scandal that belies many increasing wealthy countries.

In June I attended three films at the Sydney Film Festival that had

religious themes. Each was different but illuminating:

Calvary (2014, MA)

This film had a wide commercial release and many reviews, mostly by secular reviewers who clearly had no understanding of the issues or base of the film set in contemporary Ireland. This is an adult film, struggling with the ever present matter of sexual abuse in the church, and revolves around a good priest who during hearing a man’s confession is given a ‘death sentence’ by the man who had been abused by another priest. It is a black comedy with an edge that is at times unnerving and it also provides an insight into an Ireland that is post-Catholic, but always Catholic, and in a state of confused ethics.

Stop the Pounding Heart (2014)

This dramatised documentary centres around a Christian family in Texas and one of the 12 children — Sara, a teenager who is beginning to relate to and wonder about boys and one in particular — a member of the nearby rodeo circuit. Sara’s mother helps her to understand her feelings and the issues involved. The film is quite sensitive to Christian practices and understandings, and is an intimate portrayal of a family who are basically content with few material possessions and demonstrate Christian love toward each other and

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