

ACCatalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

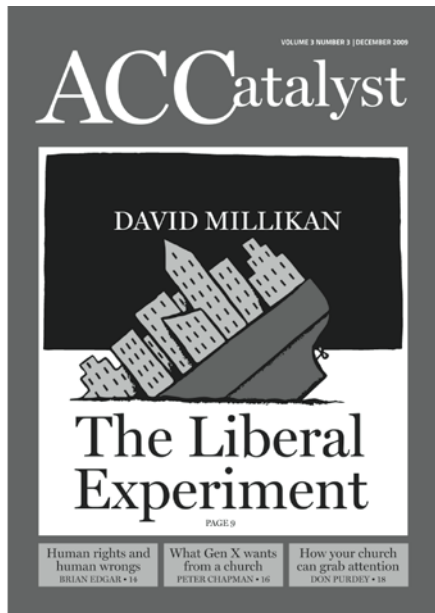
In Transit

RON BROOKMAN returns to the Uniting Church,
while BARRY CHANT says goodbye

Seeking consensus
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What church is for
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Cover Photo meshaphoto/istock

EDITORIAL

Listen to subeditors

I was taught never to use a gerund (the *-ing* form of a verb used as a noun) by wily old subeditors. Gerundives (verbs used as adjectives) were almost as bad according to sticklers.

(This sort of grammatical precision now seems almost ancient.)

The name “Uniting Church in Australia” would have been frowned upon. So it is interesting to read of a debate “United or Uniting” held last month (see page 3). Did anyone question the grammar?

Is it out of order to point out that

at this very point the UCA resembles the Anglican claim of having no specific doctrine of their own?

For if we are Christian we are both “United” in Christ, and “Uniting” —being built together by the Holy Spirit?

And if the Spirit is not what draws us into unity we have no real hope of getting there, despite resolutions, church meetings and the like. Whether United or Uniting we are part of God’s church.

John Sandeman

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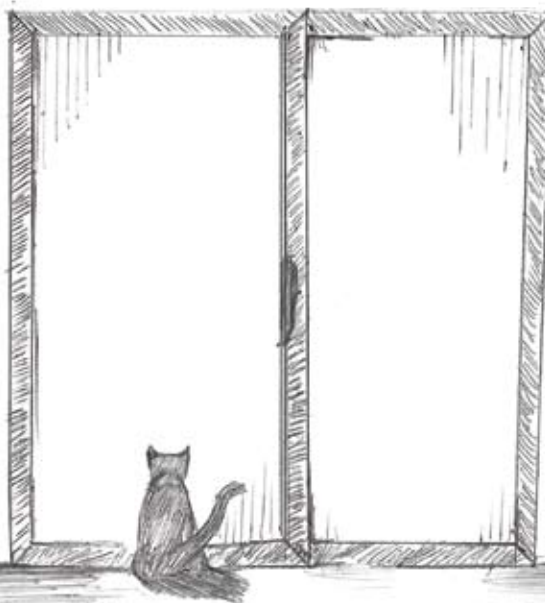
A cat is always on the wrong side of a closed door

Ever noticed that? Now that my cat Rubey has settled in here I have been trying to encourage her to go outside and explore the great outdoors. Most of the time she sticks her nose outside, sniffs the air and returns to her favourite sleeping spot in the lounge room. However, I have discovered that if I want her to go outside, I just shut the sliding door. As soon as Rubey hears the sound of that door closing she is there meowing and demanding to be let out.

Cats just don’t like shut doors of any sort; they like to be able to go anywhere they want, and usually they don’t want to go there unless they can’t.

This is what St Paul talks about in Romans 7—not cats exactly, but humans who aren’t much different. God gave the law and said (for example) “Do not covet” and all of a sudden we found ourselves wanting to covet all sorts of stuff.

We tend to find things alluring



because they are forbidden to us. If they weren’t forbidden, we wouldn’t want to do them. That is the nature of human beings and cats. If God said no one was allowed to wear green clothing, all of a sudden we would all be filled with a secret de-

sire to wear green! The problem is, we can reach the conclusion that God just bans anything that is fun because he wants us to be dull.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, human beings are complex things. Cars are complex things and so they come with instruction manuals. If you want your car to go well you take notice of what the manufacturer tells you. If they warn you not to do something, you generally don’t do it.

The Bible is kind of like an instruction manual from our maker. God knows what is and isn’t good for human beings, and that’s why he tells us so we don’t mess up our lives.

With God, there is a reason for every door he closes.

And we need to remind ourselves that there are a lot of good things in this world that God has given us to enjoy.

Make the most of them!
Robyn

ACC NEWS



Meeniyan UC, Victoria is the latest ACC congregation to add the ACC logo and name to their church notice sign.

Max travelling north

On the weekend of 16 - 17 October, Rev. Dr Max Champion, Chair of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (ACC), visited NSW. On the Saturday, he was a guest speaker at the state meeting held at Liverpool Uniting Church, (along with Dr Barry Chant—see Barry’s paper reflecting on his time in the Uniting Church on page 7). Max then travelled to Richmond to meet members at St Andrews’ Uniting Church, an ACC member Congregation. Max was the guest preacher at the two morning services, taking the Gospel of Luke (5:1-11) as his focus.

Parts of Liverpool Uniting Church were taped off as a crime scene area on the morning of the NSW ACC state meeting, as sadly the church office had been broken into earlier, and a significant amount of vandalism had resulted from people searching for valuables.

John Sturgess

● From 29–31 October Dr Champion visited Queensland
Friday 29th October: A Seminar titled “Progressive Christianity—A conspiracy to Re-invent Jesus” was held at the Chapel at the Qld Synod Offices commencing at 7.30 pm. Max addressed a group of almost 60 people for about 45 minutes and this presentation was

followed by 30 minutes of questions.

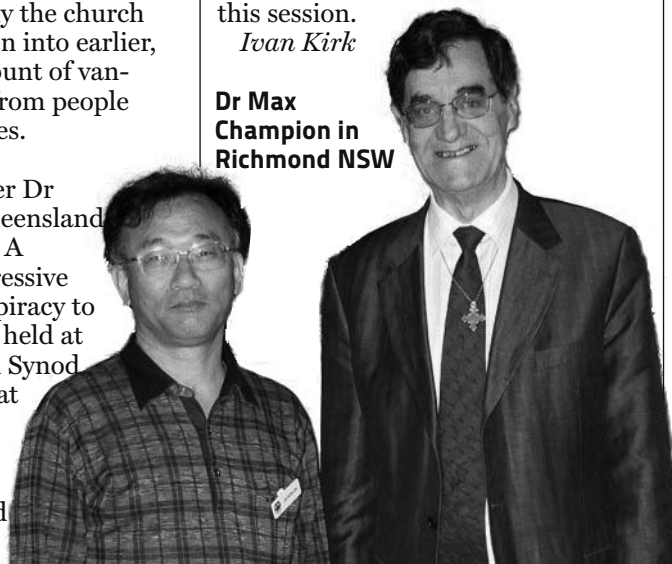
Saturday 30th October: The same seminar was offered at Alexandra Headland Conference Centre. About 30 people were in attendance. A number of visitors from the Presbyterian Church were welcomed. The seminar followed much the same format and was followed by considerable discussion.

Sunday 31st October: Max preached at our ACC congregation at Paradise Point.

He was much encouraged by the vitality of the congregation and the effective ministry of the Revd Colin Shenfield. The service was followed by a question and answer session on the ACC. About 30 people stayed for this session.

Ivan Kirk

**Dr Max
Champion in
Richmond NSW**



U or Non U?

The provocative question “Are we United or Uniting?” drew 90 people to a one day Symposium at the United Theological College in North Parramatta on November 6.

“If the UCA is not Uniting, then it is nothing” was UCA Assembly President Alistair Macrae’s forthright answer. He described the title “Uniting” as “wearing a cross”—referring to the pain of an incomplete project.

“Uniting is an ongoing process, not completed” agreed Rev Dr Andrew Williams-General Secretary, UCA Synod of NSW & ACT. President Macrae was asked if the UCA was still a catalyst [for Union]. He responded with a list of discussions with other churches—describing the relationship with the Lutherans as “pragmatic” with shared churches. He also referred to the 25 years of dialogue with the Anglicans including the drafting of a Covenant of Association.

In this context whether the UCA is still a “uniting” church depends on the responses of other groups. To take the Anglican response as an example: At the Anglican General Synod a motion seeking to endorse the Covenant of Association and to authorise the Primate (the church’s head bishop) to “take steps to enter” into the Covenant was stripped back to conveying merely “this church’s appreciation for the work of those who have served on the bilateral dialogue over the past thirty years”.

Leading with Chin

Andrew Chin, Evangelism & Missions Pastor at Wesley Mission, Sydney gives his first impressions of the Lausanne Conference. I am grateful to ACC for sponsoring and co-sending me with my church to attend the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation.

One highlight was Villacorta who in speaking on “Poverty” asked: “Why is it that the growth of churches is not significantly changing the level of injustice in the world?”

“Can we agree that Christians care about all suffering?” John Piper pleaded in another session. “For to ignore the eternal suffering for the unsaved is to have a defective view of hell, yet to disregard the earthly suffering of humankind is to have a defective heart”.



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PUBLIC SQUARE

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

Marriage Equality

The deconstruction of marriage as a sacred union between a man and a woman continues apace. Recently Federal Parliament narrowly passed a motion, sponsored by Green member Adam Brandt, asking MPs to consult their electorates about attitudes to same-sex marriage. The minority Labor government is under pressure to become more “progressive.” In the media, gay and lesbian students and couples with children are paraded regularly to advance the cause of social inclusion and highlight the pain of rejection.

The slightest quibble about the homosexual agenda is met with scorn.

It all seems so simple. Who could be against “equal love” and “sexual diversity,” especially when “gender pluralism” is assumed to be akin to ethnic diversity, red hair or left-handedness?

Despite what is said, the issues are not clear-cut. As Christopher Pearson says “The most obvious thing about the arguments in support of same-sex marriage is their shallowness. The best Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young could manage last week was to remind us breathlessly that we are living in the year 2010, as though that settled the matter. The Greens’ line that all loving couples deserve to be treated equally is just as specious.” (*The Weekend Australian*, 20-21/11 p14)

The Australian public deserves better than to be subjected to a barrage of simplistic slogans that stifle debate and intimidate “religious” opposition. The Church should not be cowed. It should insist that “love” is connection with the grace and righteousness of

God. If we fail then all manner of relationships will be permitted. The next item is a case in point.

Big Love

In *Talking Point* (*The Weekend Australian* 20-21/11 p15) reader Mark Zielezna asks “If gay marriage is to become legalised, then why not bigamous, polygamous, or even incestuous marriage?”

He has correctly identified the logic in the case for “equal love” in marriage. If sexual relationships of all kinds are defined by an infinitely diverse and malleable “love,” there can be no objection in principle to formalising them in law.

This scenario isn’t far-fetched. In the same edition, columnist Emma Jane (*Inquirer* p7) reports that the Canadian Polyamory Advocacy Association is set to fight for “group marriage rights” in the Supreme Court. Seen as the “new gay” in the sexual revolution, it is inevitable that, in time, families of three or more people living together in committed relationships will be accepted on the basis that they love each other.

Unless the Church, as a matter of urgency, is prepared to affirm and defend the splendour of marriage between a man and a woman, our society will welcome a Big Love which has nothing in common with the biggest love of all.

Persecution in Iraq and Iran

A recent report from the *Australian Prayer Network* makes disturbing reading.

“Christians in Iraq are living in a state of fear after a series of blasts targeted Christian neighbourhoods. The blasts followed a siege at a Baghdad church 10 days earlier that left more than 50 people dead. In the latest attacks at least four people were killed and around 25 injured when roadside bombs and mortar shells targeted homes and a church in six predominantly Christian districts across Baghdad. An interior ministry source said, ‘This latest operation came as a continuation of the attack that targeted the church.’

“Two days after the church siege, an Al-Qaeda front group that claimed responsibility for the attack, threatened further violence, saying that Christians everywhere were ‘legitimate targets’. A Baghdad church leader said that Iraqi Christians were ‘panicked’ and did not know what to do. Archbishop Dawod, an Iraqi church leader in London, warned of a pending ‘genocide’ and urged Christians to flee the country. However a senior cleric in Baghdad called for them to stay and bear witness.

“Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians have already been driven from their homeland over the last 20 years because of attacks by Muslim extremists. The exodus is expected to accelerate in light of the latest violence. Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of Barnabas Fund, said: ‘My heartfelt prayers go out to the Baghdad Christian community, which is under siege by Islamist militants wanting to rid the country of Christians. I fear these latest attacks may precipitate the end of the Church in Iraq.’”

His fears are echoed by Eden Naby and Jamsheed K. Choksy in “Islamic

Religious Chauvinism drives Christians out" (*The Weekend Australian*, 6-7/11 p23) who say "There is an alarming possibility there will be no significant Christian communities in Iraq or Iran by century's end".

Clearly, the cause of religious freedom in such countries should be championed by human rights advocates. Why is it, then, that we do not see that freedom of belief and practice is also being eroded in countries like Australia which spawned human rights? And why is there so little resistance?

Banning the Burqa

In *Layers of meaning in Islamic headwear (Insights November 2010 pp14-16)* the Rev Dr Chris Budden analyses the complex issues surrounding the burqa controversy. Of particular interest is his discussion of the nature of the secular state. "When we claim to be a secular state, we mean that there is no place for the church or other religious bodies to try to unduly influence the democratic process and that public discourse rests in reason and not revelation." If this is so, he says, we need to ask whether a secular state should have a place in the public square for religion or whether all faiths should be treated equally.

The presence of Islam, so dramatically represented by the burqa, brings these questions into sharp focus in a culture that has become comfortable with the easy alliance of church and state.

A most interesting way to proceed, says Dr Budden, is to "explore the way in which Islam rejects the assumptions of modern society that religion is private and has no place in public life and that loyalty to the state is more crucial than loyalty to God." Submission to Allah is the primary obligation of a true Muslim.

Christians should not resile from robust debate with our Muslim neighbours. Fundamental things divide us—including our understanding of God and the significance of Jesus. But we should be grateful for the reminder that being good citizens in a secular society is secondary to our faith in God.

In a Western society like Australia, that, over a long period, has blurred the distinction between Christian faith and civic decency, the confronting presence of the burqa may force us to think again. If so then it would be most desirable to express our thanks face to face.

School chaplains

The Federal Government recently increased funding for school chaplains. In *The Age* (15/11 p15) Damien Murphy reports on PM Gillard's \$222 million dollar pledge to the National School Chaplaincy Program set up by former PM Howard. "Constitutional concerns about the separation of church and state or fears that too many under-trained chaplains are being press-ganged into action to deal with troubled teenagers have been swept aside in the subsidy scramble."

Dr. Bob Montgomery, a past president of the Australian Psychological Society, says "it is to be regretted that Australian governments have chosen to fund such well-intentioned amateurism when qualified professionals are sorely needed".

Evangelical Christians have largely welcomed the government's continuing commitment to the program. Radical humanists, however, are not so sanguine. In *The Sunday Age* (14/11) readers expressed dismay at the "bizarre" situation in which

"myths, superstition and supernatural mumbo-jumbo" are taught in a secular education system.

The proposal for an ethics-based curriculum as an alternative to chaplains has been warmly welcomed by many, as has the suggestion that all religions or none should be taught in a multicultural, multi-faith society.

What should the church make of the government's support for mainly Christian chaplains in schools? We should expect a high standard of theological and teacher training, a love of children and young people and a sensitivity to their needs and backgrounds.

However, while welcoming the opportunity to engage students in age-appropriate ways with the Good News, we should not delude ourselves that Christianity is making a comeback. Chaplains will have done very well if, in their person and by their teaching, they help a few students and members of staff to see that society is truly secular when it is open to the humanity of God embodied in Jesus.

IAN CLARKSON

What killed Goliath?

Everyone thinks it was the stone from David's sling. Amongst the scores of thousands of fear-paralysed Israelite soldiers, were surely some as good as David with a sling. No, it wasn't skill of arm and eye that slew Goliath. It was something deep inside David. Something invisible, born in the solitude and integrity of heart of a young man who waited on God.

It came out when David heard Goliath—heard him defying God's presence and power, blaspheming His name. When he heard that, David burned with passion for the honour of his God.

A passion for wanting "the whole world to know that there is a God in Israel". No, it wasn't the pebble in David's hand that killed Goliath—it was the holy passion in his heart.

No other Israelite soldier had that. They had it for themselves—for their own honour, for food, for money, for their safety, for their personal achievements. But David felt it for God and for the great pur-

poses of the Kingdom of God.

Do you have zeal in your heart like that? Paul speaks of the love which is genuinely Christian. "Be never lacking in zeal"—that is don't delay or hold back from getting on with what you know to be right. "Keep your spiritual fervour"—that is, keep hot, or keep on the boil, with the realities of the Spirit. You are serving The Lord!

Let Goliath stand for anything that mocks our intended victory in what is excellent. What are these defying Goliath's? Settled attitudes untested by the Spirit and the Word? Motivation bleeding addictions? Shame shadows of the past? Fear of losing friends and man's approval? Whatever!

We shall attack with loud cries to God. Let us fight the good fight till they are under our feet. Though all Israel lay down and accepted it, David wouldn't tolerate one mocker of His God. Let the passion of Christ, who burned for His Fathers enterprise, be stirred within us.

All the moral truth of heaven and all the unseen strength of the powers of Light are for those who trust themselves to this Way.

LETTERS

Consensus: a different perspective

I write in response to the article in the October *ACCatalyst*: "The Tyranny of Consensus". Although, I would agree that there can be problems in implementing consensus as the only or major approach to decision-making, I thought that the article was unnecessarily negative.

First, the way I have seen the system work in Uniting Church councils is that members of the respective council are asked whether they agree with the proposal. If they agree, they are to show an orange card, and if they don't agree or have concerns, they are to show a blue card. The role of the chairperson is then to give any person showing a blue card the opportunity to share their concerns and to have those concerns discussed by the meeting until a position that satisfies their concerns is reached.

In fact, I think that the dissenting person is more likely to have their concerns heard in this context than in meetings where there is a straight count of "for" and "against". In addition, the procedure often leads to a better decision.

Certainly, the idea of Christians being "of one mind" is a theme in the New Testament. We are told in Acts (4:32) that all the believers were in one heart and mind. In addition, Paul encouraged the early Christians to be of one mind (2Cor 3: 11; Phil 2: 2), as did Peter (1Pet 3: 8). This requirement did not mean that there were no divisive issues in the Church at that time. For example, both Peter and Paul took issue with the Judaizers over whether all Christians needed to

Consensus decision-making

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Consensus decision-making is a group decision making process that not only seeks the agreement of most participants, but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections. Consensus is defined by Merriam-Webster as, firstly - general agreement and, secondly - group solidarity of belief or sentiment. It has its origin in a Latin word meaning literally to *feel together*.^[1] It is used to describe both general agreement and the process of getting to such agreement. Consensus decision-making is thus concerned primarily with that process.

be circumcised Acts 10, 15, 21). We are told (Acts 15: 7) that there was much debate, as they listened to Paul and Barnabas and then James stood up and gave his judgment.

Of course, when discussion is gagged and all opinions are not heard, the decision is unlikely to be a better one. I believe that some gagging and manipulation occurred at the last Assembly with regard to the decision on the preamble, but that was because the procedure was not used appropriately. As pointed out in the article under discussion "when consensus is invoked before debate is held, disagreements of substance are excluded in principle". I couldn't agree more! If that happens, however, neither the process nor the outcome could be called consensus.

In terms of the current political situation in Australia, I do not believe that I am engaged in starry-eyed naivete, as Andrew Bolt would have it, in believing that we would have a much better political system, if the parties gave up on their posturing and actually decided to work together for the good of the country.

Consensus is not just a "weaselly way to smother real differences in beliefs and policies" but can be a constructive way to deal with issues if the parties are prepared to work together to agree on a way forward. I have been impressed at times when I have been in America about how they are able to use joint-party committees to resolve some difficult issues.

Of course, oppositions are important, but how much of the "opposing" in this country is about real differences in beliefs and policies. One of the frustrations of the community during the last election campaign was the lack of quality in the debate. Many times, the leaders resorted to name-calling and personal insults rather than real debate about beliefs and policies, and the name-calling started again before the ink was dry on the agreement with the independents. It was because of the negative campaign that so many voted for minor parties and independents and why we have a hung parliament. This situation could be used for good, or it could end up being a disaster.

Patricia Noller



Barry Chant farewells the UCA

As a guest in the Uniting Church, I am reluctant to express any observations on the Church, as I have been kindly received by almost everyone. Nevertheless, this is what I have been requested—nay, urged—to do. So for better or worse, here are some reflections of a “temporary resident”.

Common heritage

Both the Uniting Church and Pentecostalism share a common heritage—the Wesleyan concept of holiness. The story is well known of Wesley’s conversion at Aldersgate Street on 24 May 1738, when his heart was “strangely warmed” and he felt, for the first time, that he did trust in Christ. Equally important was his experience at a meeting in Fetter Lane the following January when there was an effusion of the Holy Spirit and people prayed into the small hours of the morning. Wesley recorded: *The power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His Majesty, we broke out with one voice, “We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be Lord.”*¹

Later Wesley began to develop his teaching of Christian Perfection. It was attained through an experience, discrete from conversion, that Wesley called Entire Sanctification. This was a baptism of love, “pure love expelling sin”; it was received by faith, “instantaneously, in one moment” and resulted in a life free from deliberate sin. This sounds, at least in part, not unlike a description of the Fetter Lane experience.

A century and a half later, Methodists all over the world were crying out to God for such an experience and many found themselves not only filled with love and joy, but also speaking in tongues. The Los Angeles Azusa Street story (1906) is the best-known example of this experience. It was replicated in many nations—including Australia.

However, the Methodist Church as a whole did not follow the Wesleyan direction, which some saw as an indication of a dangerous decline. At the 1912 Methodist Conference, W G Taylor, first Superintendent of Wesley Mission declared, “Back to Wesley Back to the upper room! Rekindle the waning fires of the Church’s inner life!” And on another occasion, “Apostolic methods will still produce apostolic results ... I tremble as I think of the bare possibility of this work ever being shifted from its old moorings. Disaster would be bound to follow.” It was a prophetic word.

Basis of Union

The 1977 Basis of Union is a profound document in many ways. In fact, there are those in the UC who seem to regard it more highly than Scripture! It was carefully

crafted and generally sound. However, there is a lack of clarity and definition in some areas. Paragraph One’s statement on the return of Christ, for example, is broad enough to encompass a wide range of views—from a literal physical return to a spiritual or even symbolic *parousia*.

The third paragraph does not address clearly the question of personal repentance and conversion to Christ. While stating plainly that the Church confesses Christ as Lord and that all people are called to faith in him, the need for a Wesleyan-type encounter with God through Christ is not to be found.

The description of the Scriptures as “a unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it [the Church] hears the Word of God” proved controversial from the beginning. It was this clause as much as any which prevented some ministers and churches from participating in Union.² While its intention was evidently to allow for people to distinguish between passages referring to localised and cultural practices from those that were universally applicable, it was also seen by some evangelicals as allowing readers to choose for themselves which parts were to be regarded as the Word of God. To evangelicals, believing as they do (and as I do) that all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), this clause was too subjective and hence unacceptable.

The Great Command

The strength of the UC lies in its adherence to the Great Command (John 13:34). The very name “Uniting” implies both a desire and a willingness to work with others and to continue the process of Union rather than seeing it as a *fait accompli*.

The Church is known for its care and concern for the poor and underprivileged.

The Exodus Foundation is an example of dedicated and compassionate work for the needy. Under the leadership of Bill Crews, *The Exodus Foundation Support Services team strives to create a sense of belonging and self-worth—something everyone hopes for and deserves. The team is committed to affirming and validating all individuals, developing and nurturing trust and respect between staff and clients, providing a professional and confidential service, and identifying and responding promptly to emerging issues and needs. Nearly one thousand requests for assistance are received each month by the Foundation.*³

Of course, Wesley Mission is in the forefront of welfare work and concern, with its huge budget and its staff of 2,500 people. Wesley ministers to the sick, the elderly, the homeless, the poor, the young, the victims of substance abuse, the abandoned, the lonely and the abused.⁴

There is little doubt that those who are engaged in areas like these have a genuine concern for people in need and see their ministry as truly reflecting the compassion of Christ.

The Basis of Union expresses the desire to create an environment where there is provision for “difference of opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith” (#14). The result is that, although the term is not specifically spelled out in the Basis of Union, “inclusiveness” has become a watchword in the UC. Indeed, one of the great strengths of the UC is its willingness to accept anyone, regardless of who they are. I myself am an example of this—a Pentecostal preacher being accepted as senior pastor of Wesley International Congregation (WIC), the largest UC congregation in the State.

The Great Commission

The Basis of Union talks in general terms about the need to “hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations” (#1). In practice, evidence of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15, 16) being implemented is sometimes not easy to find. The Board of Mission in NSW is one of the bright spots in the Church and individual congregations are attempting evangelism, but they are clearly a minority.

Certainly, the UC is in decline. While the Australian population increases by around 7% every five years, the Uniting Church has decreased steadily since its inception. In 1976, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians represented 19.4% of the population; in 1981, the Uniting Church represented 15.2%; in 1986, 13.1%; in 1991, 18.2%; in 2001, 6.6%.

Plainly, union is not in itself a cause of growth. Tying two sinking ships together will not stop them sinking.

In a Sydney Presbytery meeting a few years back, one speaker told how a Muslim family were attending his church and he actually tried to talk them out of being baptised (presumably so they would feel accepted as they were). As it happened, they insisted on baptism and he went ahead. More recently, there has been the debate on the proposed new Preamble to the Constitution. The syncretism implied in this document seems to be seen as a virtue by many people. Yet it clearly flies in the face of the Great Commission.

In a statement prepared by Wesley Mission, we read—*All things, all cultures, all traditions and customs, all people(s), are fallen and broken through the grip of sin (Romans 3: 23, 8: 18-21) and are transformed in Christ (Acts 17: 30, Colossians 1: 19-20, Revelation 21: 5). In this regard there is no distinction between particular groups along the lines of culture, social status, gender, age, sexuality etc (Gal. 3: 28). It is misleading to suggest that any culturally identified pre-Christian group had “particular insights into God’s ways” (Clause 3). The only possible exception would be the Hebrew people whose particular story explicitly paved the way for the Messiah to come.*

Synod and Presbytery meetings I have attended rarely devote much time to evangelism or outreach. Given the declining nature of the Church, I find this astonishing. Surely it should be our first priority!

The other day, I was initially heartened to receive a copy of an Assembly document called *Towards a Theology Relating to Mission*⁵. The document talks plainly of reconciliation and declares that the power of sin and death were defeated (#6). But it does not say how. While the Scripture declares that Christ died for our sins, and that this is of “first importance” (1 Corinthians 15:3), the document does not. Nor is there any mention of the concept of atonement or of Christ becoming sin for us, or bearing our sins in His own body on the tree (Isaiah 53:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 5:21;

1 Peter 2:24). Sadly, there is rarely even a mention of the cross, which is the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18; Galatians 6:14).

The Great Compromise

A previous President of the Uniting Church wrote, “We are a church within which there are differing opinions... and where councils, ministers and members are able to give voice to those different opinions and make decisions about what it means for ministry in their place.”⁶

I noted above that the best thing about the UC is that it will accept anyone—including me. Ironically, the worst thing about the UC is also that it will accept anyone. The debate over ordination of homosexuals highlights the dilemma faced by a Church which is so open.

For me the surprising thing is that the debate ever occurred in the first place! How can the Church of Jesus Christ so readily depart from Scripture? It is here that the language in the Basis of Union that the Scriptures are a “unique prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the Word of God” has proven inadequate. This is not to be lacking in compassion, but it is to realise that the Great Command is incomplete without the Great Commission. “Neither do I condemn you” must be balanced by “Go and sin no more”.

It is of interest, for example, to examine the definition of sexual misconduct in the Uniting Church Regulations (7.7.4) where neither adultery nor homosexual behaviour are mentioned, although both are specifically named in Scripture as being sinful (Matthew 5:27-30; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11)⁷. In the absence of any clear statement that homosexual behaviour is wrong, arguments have been mounted that it is in fact acceptable.⁸

One further example. At a Presbytery meeting three or four years ago, one of the members turned up blind drunk. Perhaps the Church cannot be blamed for this behaviour. But to my knowledge, on subsequent occasions, the man continued to attend Presbytery. I still find this incredible. Further, governance is built on the premise of small local congregations. For a local church like Wesley International Congregation, with a regular constituency of 1200, and a pastoral staff of ten, the UC regulations are sometimes less than helpful.

The Question of Authority

Over fifty years ago, Martyn Lloyd-Jones published a small book entitled *Authority*. In the introduction he argued that both Catholicism and Pentecostalism were growing and expanding for the same reason—both spoke with a voice of authority. To me, this is what is lacking in the UC today. There are so many voices. Consensus offers leadership from the bottom up rather than the top down. The authority of Scripture is too often compromised.

I thank God for my time at Wesley. I love the people at Wesley International Congregation (WIC) with deep affection and I am sad to be finishing. Wesley Mission is committed to the Scriptures and WIC is a biblical, lively, congregation, with a great heart for mission. But, beyond that, and I say it reluctantly, I am looking forward to working once again in a fellowship of ministers and churches where I don’t have to apologize for believing in the Word and power of God.

1 For the sake of brevity, I have not included specific references to the quotations used here. They can generally be found in my *The Spirit of Pentecost*, currently available for perusal at www.barrycham.com and shortly to be published by Emeth Press.

2 At the time of Union, some evangelical Presbyterians and Congregationalists formed ‘continuing’ denominations. There were also some Methodists who did not participate, but continued as independent congregations or joined another movement.

3 See http://www.billcrews.com.au/html/exodus.htm?our_services/our_services

4 *Putting Others First: Our 2010 Annual Review*, Wesley Mission, 2010.

5 C.Walker et al, *Towards a Theology Relating to Mission*, Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia Standing Committee, March 2010.

6 Letter to Ministers, Members and Councils of the Uniting Church, 25 August, 2003.

7 It is fair to say that other documents of the Church are more specific on these issues, but these comments are correct as applied to the definition of sexual misconduct in the Regulations.

8 M.J.Osterman, *Claiming the Promise* Chicago: Reconciling Congregation Program 1997:14. Although this is not a UC publication, it was available for sale at the NSW UC Synod in 2005.

Ron Brookman

Why I sought fresh recognition as a minister of Word and sacrament in the UCA

Initially, circumstances caused me to ask the question, “Should I apply to have my ordination recognized afresh?” In 2004 I was asked to take the role of a Lay Pastoral Assistant to establish a ministry of healing around a new congregation at Ramsgate UCA. My commission was to establish a new congregation focusing on contemporary worship styles, offering a ministry of healing. God blessed my work over the next three years to grow a congregation of more than 60 people.

Some, wanting to be married, or baptised, wanted me to officiate.

The loudest cry was that their pastor be allowed to serve them the Eucharist. It seemed also that this sacrament was central to a ministry of healing. My newly-formed congregation pressed me to seek recognition of my ministerial credentials.

I had resigned in good standing as a minister of the UCA in 2000 because I was no longer in active fellowship with the UCA, having been seconded to another denomination.

A practical reason had been wanting a home for my family: I needed to access part of my super as a deposit.

In my considerations, many questions perplexed me. Having renounced my secret homosexuality, and received Christ’s transformation to heterosexuality, could I be at home in a Church of open inclusivity and advocacy for homosexuals? Further, could I reconcile my other passion, leading Living Waters, a servant ministry to the

wider Church, given the UCA’s stance?

Living Waters offers Christ’s compassion and healing to people who are tormented by their broken sexuality. We minister Christ’s grace to restore men and women to the true glory of wholesome gender, that reflects God, in whose image we were made, male and female (Gen 1:27-8).

To provide a safe place for the broken to receive mercy, Living Waters is not active in controversial debate or social action. Our action is to walk the healing journey with the sexually tormented, addicted, abused and confused, to see them find hope in Christ’s transforming power. Other questions which begged answers were, “would my orthodox, reformed, evangelical and charismatic spirituality have a home in the UCA?” And, “is my understanding of the authority of Scripture consistent with the Basis of Union?”

Prayerfully I examined each of these.

Jesus’ initial words to me seemed to be that He loves the Church, and that all churches are precious to Him, despite each falling short in one way or another, in reflecting His truth and glory.

He loves the UCA! It seemed to me that the UCA, for all its short-comings was my spiritual home. Through the difficult times of confession to the church of my double life, my sexual sin in acting out homosexually, and therefore my spiritual abuse of my congregation at Newtown Mission, the UCA at all Council levels was gracious and supportive.

She sensitively exercised discipline and restoration, to the people I had abused, to myself and to my family.

Loving relationship, reflecting the character of Jesus is as important as doctrine reflecting His truth. As I stepped out on this premise, I was not disillusioned. UCA leaders whose theological stance was very different from mine advocated for my restoration!

My spiritual heritage is Wesleyan. His 44 sermons continue to be a base document for ongoing reflection of mission, ecclesiology and doctrine in the UCA, and in my own journey. Though I may disagree with stances taken by some within the Church, and even with some of the resolutions of her councils, I considered that I

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Sexuality: A new frontier for Evangelism

RON BROOKMAN on meeting society's new challenges

The rapidly changing mores of Australian society have created a new culture of sexuality. As sexual practice has moved from the bedroom or hidden places, to the TV, computer and electronic game screen, sexuality has been both trivialized and exploited. Christian values and standards have increasingly been disregarded, in some places, as much in the church as society. In our pluralistic society this seemed inevitable, which is perhaps why the church has failed to take a stand and make an impact on our changing national values.

Pluralism isn't only to blame. Agendas of powerful organisations have set out to change the playing field. Homosexual lobbyists have successfully pushed for various expressions of same-sex relationships and sexuality to be normalised. Calling for not just acceptance, but for people to have some experience of their LGBT forms of sexuality, they have used media, education and health services to promote their distortions. By taking these and pushing the boundaries of heterosexuality, film makers, the pop music industry, and print and TV media, in a quest for ratings and profit, have struck the ever-excitable, never-satisfied sexual chords in audiences' hearts.

They create seeds of fantasy and give glimpses of sexual technique far flung from the intimacy of the marriage bed. This intrusion has created problems for a related industry, the pornographers. Having their ground stolen by mainstream media, they have created their distinctive mark by becoming explicitly and shamelessly graphic, merging violence with sexuality, and by nurturing an addicted audience. The telcos have cashed in with their 3G networks, which are only viable if a significant percentage of their customer base pays for porn. Porn, which is viewed increasingly through all age groups, of both genders, from age 11, is setting the standards for sexual practice, preference and values, so driving the licentiousness and amorality of Australian sexuality.

Sexual Addiction is being promoted for profit, and is becoming as big a problem, though more covert, as drug, alcohol and gambling addictions. Christians who, in the past, would never have entertained pornography, or anonymous chat which becomes sexual, have been seduced into it through aggressive internet marketing.

An Appropriate Christian Response?

Pontificating about the evils of this new frontier will not be heard. The church will only be confirmed as the wowers we have always seemed to be. In most denomi-

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have a legitimate and worthwhile contribution to make to the life of our church. The emphasis on sanctification in the ministry of Living Waters, and reliance on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of healing, are founded in our Wesleyan heritage. Considering these things my hope was that my voice, among many voices, would add to the church's richness and life.

The inclusivity of the UCA is a wonderful grace. The gospel welcomes all into the Kingdom of God. In bringing me, Jesus formed Himself in me by transforming my sexuality and setting me free from strong sexual drives which precluded my being at peace with Him.

I cannot help but proclaim His work in me! The Moderator, during my meeting with the Minister's Reception

Committee, commented that genuine inclusivity welcomes those who have renounced homosexuality as well.

Not all who are homosexual in the church have made peace with it. We need to be able to bring Christ's liberty, healing and peace to them, and to the increasing numbers, male and female who struggle with heterosexual addiction.

A curse of our time is its exacerbation through the internet. In seeking the Lord of our church, I sensed a call to advocate for the victims of corporations who invest huge sums for profit by snaring the sexual brokenness of society. I realised how consistent this call is with the UCA's championing of social justice.

My decision to apply for fresh recognition as a minister has been a response to God's call through His Spirit in the Church, and in the inner witness of my soul. I come aware of my own fallibility, and that of my brothers and sisters, to love and work together for the coming forth of God's Kingdom in our midst!

nations, sadly the new frontier is accepted to one degree or another. Pastorally it's difficult to minister to and monitor. In my own church recently I had a couple tell me they were choosing to live together openly, then ask if I would forbid them from coming to church. My response was "no", at the same time encouraging them to consider the value of, and Godly reasons for, marriage. They lasted a few months but found reason to leave, to look for a church in which they would not be noticed.

Prophetically living and demonstrating Godly standards of love and sexuality, so that their value and fruitfulness are proved over the long term, is certainly a starting point.

To recall that humans can't flaunt God's prescriptions for living and sexuality without incurring wounding, pain and desolation of soul is one thing, and to compassionately reach out with the gospel of restoration is another.

The spoilt fruit of godless sexuality, which has little to do with love, and more to do with the quest for identity, self-expression, power and experience, will diminish human dignity rather than serve it. It will ravage the human soul and erode the intimacy of pro-creational love. Family, for all its many contemporary expressions, in turn will become less a place of secure belonging, more a place of developmental confusion. Mental illness, social instability, emotional pain and sexual addiction will increasingly become the milieu in which the church is called to bear witness.

Bearing witness is our hope as we face the current darkness while Satan overplays his hand. He is striking at sexuality because it so powerfully reflects the image of God. Sexuality has to do with love, creation (not just of babies, but of healthy relationships) and covenant, three of the most significant characteristics of God's very being. Made in His image, sexuality is a key reflection of God's Person in humankind. It flows hand in hand with our spirituality. Whereas spirituality is on the vertical dimension in enabling intimacy between human and God, sexuality is on the horizontal level, enabling intimacy between humans. Satan, in confusing and defiling sexuality, confuses and defiles spirituality. Perhaps that is the reason that Eastern forms of spirituality are so popular, and why the church struggles to know what it believes and practises, regarding sexuality.

God's power for salvation is the Cross. The cleansing power of Jesus' blood reaches to the deepest, darkest and most deadly confines of the soul. This is exactly where wry sexuality afflicts, stores its poisons and torments, then wreaks havoc. It works against true intimacy by reinforcing the excitement of sexual encounter without love. It relentlessly drives those it has snared in addiction, to act out fantasies, often on unwilling or underage victims.

It leaves an imprint of "unclean", "wasted" or "spoilt" at the heart of those who know they've gone too far, but can't stop. Or creates a learned sexual identity which is believed to be innate. Deceived hearts create sinful

devices to survive. The devices destroy the heart, its relationships and families. Statistics of increasing depression, mental illness, divorce and family breakdown, have only just begun to reveal the painful implications of this shameless attack on soul and society.

The spoilt fruit of godless sexuality, which has little to do with love, and more to do with the quest for identity, self expression, power and experience, will diminish human dignity rather than serve it.

When Jesus died on the Cross, He became the sin of all the world, in order to take it away. In what defies our understanding, He was willing to take into His own body, everything perverted and defiled. He alone is able to descend to the depths of the human soul to cleanse, forgive, restore and make pure. What good news we have to proclaim and enact! The gospel is the one hope of restoring human dignity and wholeness. The challenge for the church in our time is to find the keys to engage with the victims of our sexually-sensate society, and to offer the healing of salvation. It is to develop creative ways of communicating this message of hope. It is to have or develop ministries of healing for broken sexuality. It is to provide a safe, non-judgemental, unshockable place for men and women to unload the pain and helplessness of their plight. It is to provide a confidential environment for the confession of shame, sin and guilt, and to minister the forgiveness, healing and freedom of Jesus. It is to disciple folk in the ways of Jesus, addressing underlying issues of sexuality such as gender development, self image, habitual sin, abuse, idolatry, freedom from sexual soul ties, and even the curse of generational sexual sin, and its effect on succeeding generations. It is to teach Godly values in sexuality, explaining the reasons for them, and to educate, not so much about safe sex, but sanctified or "sacred sex".

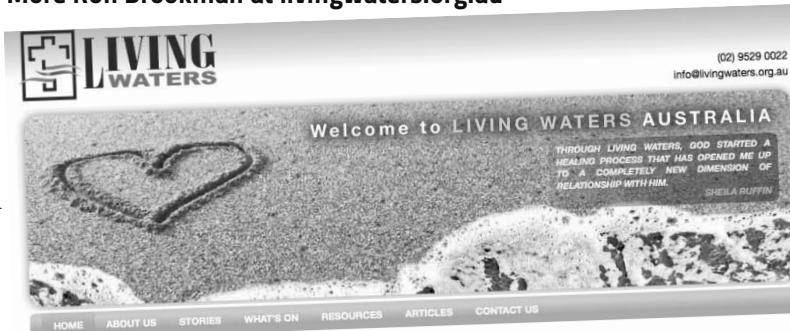
Realistically we need to offer such ministry to many within the church, as well as making it an opportunity for evangelism.

Such a prophetic, healing and teaching ministry is a vital hope for our times!

Rev Ron Brookman leads Restore Healing Community at Ramsgate UCA, Sydney. He is also the Australian Director of Living Waters, a healing ministry to the

sexually broken. Living Waters offers training and courses that minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, freedom from sexual addiction, and strategies to help folk negotiate the internet. Ron also offers healing and contemplative retreats. www.restore.org.au www.livingwaters.org.au

More Ron Brookman at livingwaters.org.au



The Primary

Brian Medway on what

In all my years of being a Christian leader I have never been part of a group anywhere that had gathered to find out how we could see the Great Commission fulfilled. On just a few occasions I have been in a room with some of the “who’s who” of Christian leadership in Australia. This issue was never raised or discussed.

Similarly, I have never been among leaders of a local congregation who were desperate to see how to contribute to this task. I have met with Christian leaders for all kinds of other reasons: prayer, unity, national and international events to name a few. I have been places where evangelicals gathered around evangelicalism and with charismatics and Pentecostals who gathered around charismatic and Pentecostal distinctives—but never to become accountable in our obedience of the clear command/commission of Christ.

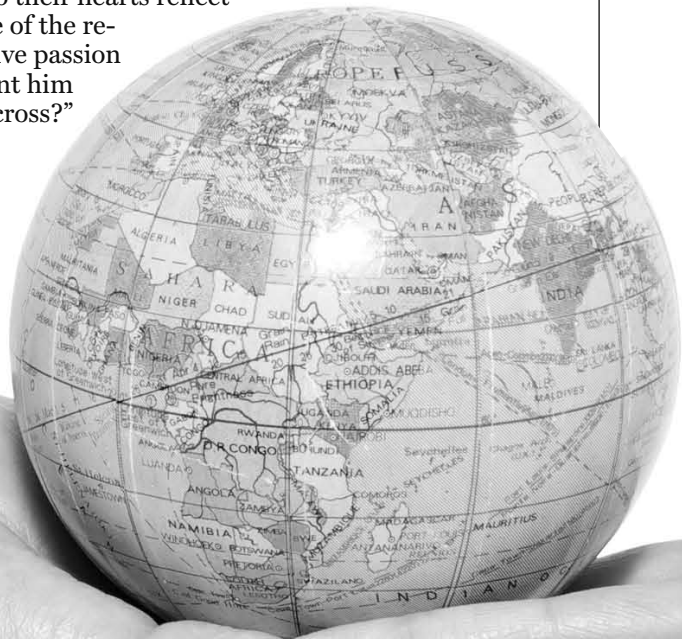
I have also sat with leaders of the church in various cities and towns. In some cases those meetings saw a large percentage of the leaders gathered. Not once has someone asked the simple question as to how we might do what Jesus told us to do. As a result, we have never tried to enlist people

for this task and we have never tried to help each other to be accountable to it. We have never measured ourselves against this purpose in order to see how we were going. It seems, from my experience, that most Christian leaders are embarrassed by the idea.

I can understand Paul’s angst for the Galatians in this regard. “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of child birth until Christ is formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19) Paul talks as though they need to be born again, again. He experiences the same sharp pains

and is filled with the same urgency as he had done before. The pains were not for a birth into the experience of salvation, but a birth from compromised faith to fulfilled destiny. The problem for the Galatians was that they had begun their experience by a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit and were then turning to legalistic human traditions. We have done exactly the same thing. The combination of some experience of Jesus modified by pagan western cultural values has brought us to the point where we need to rediscover Jesus and the work of the gospel.

A question that I find myself asking is, “Why do the words of the great commission sound so faint and seem so distant to so many who supposedly follow Jesus? Why do their hearts reflect so little of the redemptive passion that sent him to the cross?”



The truth is that the devil has not robbed them of their salvation. Instead, he has diverted their energy and focus from primary purpose to non-primary purposes. That diversion has taken many different forms. An example of such a distraction happened at a time when William Carey spoke to the gathering of his Eng-

Part one of Brian Medway’s article ran in ACCatalyst’s last issue.. This version has been lightly edited for length.

Purpose *Church is for*

lish Baptist colleagues about the need to go to the nations of the world and preach the gospel. He met the following now famous response: “*Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine.*”

It seems amazing to us that sincere, Biblically-trained Christian leaders could say such things. Few of us would argue against the idea that the gospel should be preached to the nations of the world. We are legatees of a few centuries of fervent protestant missionary endeavour. The issue for us is not nations overseas but the idea of fully preaching the gospel to all the people of our own city or region. It seems we are just as capable of setting aside the commission of Jesus as those Baptist pastors did.

Putting it into the “too hard” basket.

It is my observation that many or most believers in western churches find the task of fulfilling the great commission too hard, too threatening and too uncomfortable. That’s why people are so willing to tell me that they don’t have the personality or the spiritual gift for it. They readily admire people who do seem to have that “gift” and basically rely on those few souls to do all of the Great Commission-fulfilling work that needs to be done. These people rejoice in stories about salvation and evangelistic ministry but always assume that those responsibilities are for others, not for them. I hear people all the time talking about how they think their ministry is to people “inside the church”. That “ministry” is not foreshadowed anywhere in the Bible. The task of proclaiming the gospel to every person is almost impossible to conceive and hard to do.

I know for myself that if I have the option of reading the Bible, participating in a worship or prayer time or going to a Bible study OR try and work out how I can become involved in a plan to preach the gospel to every person, I find all of the above things much easier. I have very little natural ability when it comes to fully preaching the gospel to every person.

The great spiritual-gift cop out.

We have done a real “snow job” with spiritual gift teaching in this regard. When teaching courses on spiritual gifts became popular, people headed away from the idea that they should be involved in reaching lost people based on the fact that it was not their “spiritual gift”. This nonsense was not true to the prototype believer modelled by Jesus Christ, nor

was it warranted by New Testament testimony or teaching. Worst of all it made a mockery of the specific commission and command of Jesus to the church. We used spiritual gifts as an opportunity to give sovereign power to personal preferences. The whole idea of supernatural Holy Spirit gifting is to enable individuals to BE who they couldn’t otherwise be and DO what they couldn’t otherwise do. Funny that we are willing to trust God for a supernatural word of knowledge, but we are not willing to trust him for the power to love people we don’t know.

The Great Commission is a Command, not an Option.

The great theological cop out.

It seems that we have found other more elaborate ways of avoiding the personal responsibility of committing to the task of proclaiming the gospel to every person. It

comes by different titles, but under the general heading of theology. I have come to the position that I have too much of a sense of the sovereignty of God inside me to be an Arminian. At the same time I have far too much of the idea of God giving us a free will to allow me to be a Calvinist. What amazes me as I talk with people who have strong Calvinistic views is the ease with which they seem to dismiss both personal responsibility to obey the Great Commission/command of Christ and a similar disposition that allows them to engage in all kinds of church and general Christian activities that do little or nothing directly to embrace the responsibility. For these reasons we need to give a fuller explanation of the New Testament concept of commandment.

The Great Commission is a Command, not an Option.

The revelation of God’s primary purpose or intention comes to us in the form of a command. We need to understand the function of a command in the context of New Testament faith. If I were speaking this instead of writing it, I would take this next section very slowly and probably repeat it a few times and then ask for questions. It is not something we seem to be able to grasp. Here is an example that comes from the very context of the Great Commission statement of Matthew 28.

Jesus says that all of the disciples (not just those with the “spiritual gift of evangelism”) are to make disciples of all nations. Part of that process is “teaching them everything I have commanded ...” When Moses gave a command it was entirely addressed to the exercise of the human will of the Israelites. When Jesus gives a command it is in the context of the outpouring of Holy Spirit power and in the context



of a covenant where a new heart is to be given (Ezekiel 36:26) and where everything is to become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

These and many other references describe a supernatural work of change in a person's life. This powerful indwelling can make a Christian-hating Pharisee into a Gentile loving missionary [Paul]. So the command is also a promise. When Jesus issues a command to all of the disciples on a hill beside the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection what he is saying is "I am going to supernaturally change your hearts in such a way that you will desire to disciple nations and have the authority to do the work."

The reason it comes in the form of a command is because of what has happened to the believers like us in western churches who don't like the idea of doing this or don't think they should be doing it or don't think they can do it. A command comes to us in that kind of posture and just says, "Do this". When we respond by saying that it is hard, unpalatable or impossible we are not given an option. That reaction is designed to send us to God for supernatural heart change and it is designed to dominate our prayer, Bible study, fellowship and the rest so that we position ourselves for heart change and will change. The command simply points us in the direction and the powerful presence of the Spirit can do the rest.

It is for this reason that I often say to people that such a command should make them feel guilty but not condemned. If I am not doing what God has commanded I am guilty. If I am guilty I need to take responsibility for my lack and repent, seek the presence of God and allow him to form my heart in such a way that the command becomes my desire and God's authority takes up residence in my experience. The command is there as a means of grace. It helps us especially in those areas where there seems to be a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to embrace one or other aspect of the nature of God. It exposes more sharply the need for change

Keeping the primary purpose primary

- We have to be able to keep on making the statement "We are doing this in this way because it will enable the great commission to be fulfilled".
- We have to keep on asking the question: "How will this help the gospel to be proclaimed to every person?"
- We have to keep on asking: "How can we work together so that the gospel will be proclaimed to every person?"
- We have to keep seeking the Lord: "What needs to change in my life so that I will be able to participate effectively in this work?"

in our hearts. We are to make ourselves accountable, not just to obey but to have our hearts changed so that the command is also our desire. This was the promise of the Old Covenant about the New: "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time", declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33)."

A special supernatural family needing to discover one another.

I want to find the people for whom the idea of participating in a plan that will see the gospel fully proclaimed to every person is their primary purpose.

I want to hang out with those people who wake up on any morning with that desire in their hearts and who long to discover how God intends to use us to accomplish it. I need their encouragement and their insights. They are my spiritual family in the sense that Jesus talked about in Mark 4:20-34 and my relationship to them will be of absolute strategic importance.

On a day in Capernaum when Jesus was teaching people gathered in a particular house, the religious leaders were there trying to nail him. His disciples were there because they were committed to him and a bunch of other people were there to listen to him. His family turned up outside and wanted to get him out of there because they had come to the conclusion that he was mentally ill. When the message came to Jesus inside the house he responded by telling everyone that the people who were sitting around wanting to hear from God through him were more a family to him than his own human family.

As Jesus was God's redemptive gift to the world, we are Jesus' redemptive gift to our communities.

I have around twenty people in my domestic sphere, nearly fifty in my neighbourhood, around a hundred in my workplace, a couple of hundred in the community group to which I belong and about a hundred and fifty extended family. I am indigenous and somewhat incarnate to all of these spheres. That's why I have to take Great Commission responsibility for all five hundred of them. I need to work alongside the other believers in these spheres to make sure we develop a plan to see the gospel message touch the lives of every single person. That is clearly the heart of God. It must be no less my own heart cry. I need to be changed and empowered if this is going to happen. I need to be connected to the other believers in these spheres if we are going to utilize the power Jesus gave to a thing he called "church" (Matthew 16).

The Entry Point is a change of heart not a new denomination, teaching or method.

As I have been saying, this change needs to be a heart change leading to a certain kind of lifestyle. I need to make clear that when I am talking about the great commission I am not talking about the shallow dualism that has often become the default of conservative evangelicals. The proclamation of the gospel is not just telling someone they are going to hell unless they believe in Jesus. The idea of proclaiming the gospel needs to be rediscovered from the ministry of Jesus. We need to discover how to preach the good news that he preached the way he preached it. That is as much the challenge for us as the challenge of seriously embracing the commission itself.

I am constantly amazed at the lack of genuine love for lost people I see in the hearts of colleagues and other fellow believers. I spend a lot of time with leaders and I know from these conversations that while they may be passionate about church, leadership and a host of other things, they don't love lost people.

They love being in rooms with other leaders and other believers. They can attend conference after conference and rave about the presence of God in meetings, but they just don't have a genuine love that reaches out to lost people and gives them the opportunity of being rescued.

It is the same with people who give themselves to prayer. They love prayer meetings and have become accustomed to spending long periods of time in prayer. Even though they love Jesus, their fellowship with him never seems to result in them loving what Jesus loved. What's more, they don't care that they don't care. They

Primary purpose "to do list"

1 If you don't have a heart for what is spoken about in the words of any of the Great Commission statements, get before God in prayer and repent that you have known of this command but it has not had its way with you. Ask God to forgive you and to begin to form this passion in your own heart. Make it a matter of constant prayer until you see God changing your heart.

2 Begin to read the New Testament to see how the Great Commission found expression in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early church. Make notes about everything you discover and use that revelation to shape your prayers and your obedience.

3 Start to apply this commission to one or other of the five spheres where you live or work: domestic, neighbourhood, workplace, community group or extended family. Begin to consider how God's intention for everyone of the people in the sphere to fully experience the invitation of God in the gospel might work and how you might be involved. Ask God to show you how he plans to use you to do this.

4 Start praying for every single person in this sphere. Try and learn their names so that you can pray for them regularly by name. Ask God to show you how to love them with redemptive love. Ask God to show you how the kingdom of God could come to their lives. Use these insights as a matter of prayer. If you have opportunity to gather one or more other believers in that community sphere to do the same thing—even better.

5 At a specific time, and preferably in the presence of one or more other believers, commit yourself to God to be one of his missionaries to this sphere. In the company of others (if you can) start to move this commission from being an idea to being a plan. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you ideas and read the New Testament to get ideas.

have formed a spiritual lifestyle devoid of the very thing in the heart of God that caused him to send his Son and the very thing that caused the Son to send his followers.

I am constantly amazed at the lack of genuine love for lost people I see in the hearts of colleagues and other fellow believers.

We need to join together for the purpose of seeing that the gospel is fully preached to every person. It needs to be what binds us to Jesus and to one another.

We need to find the same people based on a primary commitment to the primary purpose. This purpose is the only thing worth living for and dying for. It is worth more

than pay-checks, and superannuation. It is worth more than denominational status and more than congregational friendship. It is the only form of belonging that the world really needs. The community won't care much about the fine points of our denominational or congregational distinctives. It isn't what they need anyway.

We have given far too much honour to something that has little or none. I have seen colleagues sell up their birthright for a bit of material security and their identity as pastors or leaders of a particular denomination or congregation. Only a commitment to fully proclaim the gospel to every person will get us out of our theological ghettos and our little comfort clubs. It will deal with our self-indulgence and self-centredness. It will take away the pride that all of those things produce.

Primary Purpose is the purpose around which all the different emphases and elements find their place. It is what genuinely has the power to transcend differences and realize the potential of all of the tools as they deliver heavenly grace and power to the places where it is most needed: the hearts, lives and community spheres of people separated from Christ.

I can remember standing in the Telstra Tower Restaurant, on the top of Black Mountain in Canberra with a hundred or so of my fellow believers. On a day when the fog covered the top of the mountain until we began to sing and pray with one voice as it lifted and we could see most of the 120,000 plus households where the residents of our city were sleeping or rising to have their breakfast, we repented that we had not taken responsibility for them as we should.

We told them that we would come to them and live the good news in their presence as our Saviour had done in his own day. It was a day when we touched something very holy. Our actions represented the holy heart of love of our Father and Creator. God still feels the same way. We must have our hearts transformed until we have his heart. Then we will have the courage and the wisdom to go to fulfill what God promised the people of our region, and what he has commissioned us and authorized us to do. We cannot be satisfied with anything less than or other than that.

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Healthy families, healthy teens

PAT NOLLER on coping through the teenage years

Adolescents tend to get a bad press. Some believe that the media continually focus on a small number of “bad pennies” and ignore the positive behaviour of most adolescents.

The goals of adolescence include developing an individual identity, gaining increased autonomy from parents and developing mature relationships with peers, including exploring romantic relationships. The goal of most parents is to raise young people who can make good decisions and stand on their own feet, who have similar values to themselves, are co-operative and helpful and care about other people.

Adolescents can also be a cause of concern for their parents, because of the increased conflict between them and their parents that is part of the process of gaining autonomy and independence. Adolescents are also likely to be more moody than when they were younger and to take more risks such as driving under the influence of alcohol or driving very fast, engaging in extreme sports or, even sailing around the world like Jessica Watson.

Because of their striving for more independence, adolescents need to develop a new kind of relationship with their parents involving a greater sense of equality, but they also need the support of their parents. For this reason, the style of parenting they experience is crucial. There are generally four parenting styles (authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved) discussed in the developmental literature and these are based on two dimensions: parental responsiveness and strict control. The best parenting style based on the research is the authoritative style that involves high parental responsiveness and moderate to high control. This style of parenting has been shown to protect against a range of negative experiences such as heavy smoking, premature sexual activity, depression and suicide.

Despite what modern culture would have us believe, fathers are very important in the family. Children with involved, loving fathers are significantly more likely than other adolescents to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy for others, engage in pro-social behaviour and avoid high risk activities such as those mentioned above. On the other hand, those young people without fathers are more likely to be poor, use drugs, experience a range of problems, be victims of child abuse and engage in criminal behaviour.

The Bible does not have a lot to say about parenting, but Paul does instruct fathers not to provoke their children to anger. What behaviours of fathers might provoke young people to anger? Adolescents tend to complain that fathers don't listen to them, that they tell

them what to do rather than help them work through to their own decisions, and are generally too controlling.

What other aspect of family environments might be unhealthy for adolescents? Mental health problems of parents, marital distress or serious conflict, violence against themselves or their mothers, economic stress, too lax or too strict control and lack of appropriate



Shutterstock

monitoring or supervision are all issues that impinge directly on adolescents.

One of the problems we have in our culture is that parents tend to surrender to the wishes of their children. Parents often condone under-age drinking, for example, because they feel powerless to control their children's drinking. There have been many examples of young people going off to “schoolies week” with a carload of alcohol, including spirits, provided by their parents. Yet research shows that where parents set standards in a climate of respect, adolescents are less likely to get involved in drugs, drinking and other problem behaviours. Another issue is that parents worry about drugs like heroin and ignore the problems with alcohol that are killing our kids.

Adolescents tend to react badly to too much or too little control. Too much control can lead to rebellion and too little can lead to over-indulgence in a range of problem behaviours. Moderate control in a climate of respect from supportive loving parents is the best recipe for healthy adolescents who are likely to become responsible adults. These young people are also the ones most likely to follow their parents' Christian values and come into a relationship with Christ.

Patricia Noller, Emeritus Professor, School of Psychology, University of Queensland—based on an elective presented at the 2010 ACC conference held in Camden, NSW.

LOCAL CHURCH

Fruits of Methodism

PAUL LANGKAMP on the healthy churches of Korea

The same Methodist DNA that is fused into the UCA genes yields a rich harvest in ChangChun Methodist Church in Seoul, South Korea.

Methodist DNA is certainly there in the Basis of Union. John Wesley's 44 Sermons of 1793 are ranked alongside the Calvinist Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 and the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 as documents to be "listened to and learned" from so the Holy Scriptures can be understood.

What is distinctively Methodist is easy to see. It isn't the great doctrines of justification and salvation by faith through grace—they are the same ones that classic Christianity has always held fast for life itself.

Thomas C. Oden, the contemporary American Methodist scholar, put it this way, "...Wesleyans are so close to Calvinists in doctrinal instinct, yet so far in temperament". Calvinists and Wesley all agreed that "All key questions of salvation teaching were... apostolically defined and clarified ecumenically by consensus".

Distinctive Methodist temperament is the focus on a neglected part of a more ancient church tradition; entire sanctification. The Methodists don't just want to teach sound doctrine, but to teach the way of holiness to

believers, "constantly, strongly, explicitly" so as to bring holy life into being as an experienced reality.

To see Wesley's tried and true methods in action is amazing. ChangChun Methodist church in Sinchon in Seoul began in 1905 as an offshoot of ChangDong First Methodist. Still ChangChun isn't resting on the laurels of her long history. The 1200 seat main church building went up 25 years ago: today 3500 worshippers attend various services every week. A new 8-storey church building opened last May—high density living in downtown Seoul forces vertical expansion. Three stories are underground including a fully-equipped 250-seat hall—it must go down 40 metres—and four stories go skywards, with each floor compartmentalised into small rooms for group Bible study. Weekly tithing is more than AUS\$55,000. The Rev. ChonHyup Lee, and youth minister, said the church budgets one third for running the church, one third for mission, which includes major annual missions to Cambodia and the churches

Chang-Chun Methodist church in Sinchon in Seoul

it has established in Sri Lanka, and one third for education of disadvantaged young Koreans.

The Rev. Lee remarked that in recent months the Sunday afternoon youth service has expanded from 300 to more than 400 regular worshippers. The local youth—mostly students at the three famous universities nearby—seek the conversion that comes from Christ's grace that is always preached, and they gladly attend the small study groups to grow in grace and sanctification. It really is the old Methodist way of small classes. ChangChun also offers numerous programs of service and mission for its young members to live out the faith that grows within.

If only the top UCA leaders would do what the Basis enjoins them to do: "...commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements, (Reformed confessions, Wesley's 44 Sermons) so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace that justifies them through faith..." instead of foisting a fake political ideology on its members, then the Uniting Church mightn't look so anaemic. It would be more like ChangChun Methodist, overflowing with young folk yearning for Christ and constantly learning from prayer and Scripture and growing in holy sanctification.

Paul Langkamp is an ACCmember based in South Korea



INSIDE THE ACC

Pinning things down



Help the Pin Speak! A helpful idea from Ted Curnow in Victoria.

Wearing the ACC Pin can arouse interest and provide an opportunity to introduce others to the Confessing Movement.

Here is a suggestion to help the Pin speak. By preparing and passing on a small card listing helpful websites when people enquire you can help the Pin to continue to speak. Here is a mock-up of Ted's card.



To learn about the Confessing Movement within the Uniting Church and to join others who pray regularly for Church renewal and Christian Mission visit these websites:

www.confessingcongregations.com
www.unitingviews.com
<http://www.confessingcongregations.com/prayer/monthly-prayer-diary/>

ACC Membership Renewals

ACC supporting members and congregations are reminded that memberships are due for the present financial year July 2010-June 2011. Renewals went out in August and September. If you have not yet paid your membership, we would be grateful if you could attend to this as soon as possible. Non-financial congregations are being followed up by state ACC groups and by the National Office. For any queries about your membership please contact the ACC office.



Caring for Creation in Kampala

From Brisbane to Kampala

Nola Stewart reports that the "Caring for The Creation" Bible Studies prepared for the ACC Conference in Queensland in 2009 have been presented at a workshop in Uganda.

Nola presented the studies to a conference and workshop run by The Ecological Christian Organisation (ECO) of Uganda, in

September. ECO is a Christian organisation seeking to help people affected by climate change.

The workshop included these understandings:

(a) Dominion or rule over creation should be seen in the light of humanity's role being to be the centre of strength of Earth's ecosystems as a whole.

(b) "Go forth and multiply" is a blessing not a command.

(c) Spreading the Word of God in the New Testament is by conversion—new creation, not pro-creation as in the OT. We should not depend on building "Christian populations" through having children.

When we don't know what to pray

We have all had times in our lives when we are perplexed and we don't know how to pray effectively, about certain situations.

Romans 8:26-27 tells us that it is the Spirit Himself who makes intercession for us. This statement gives us comfort for we are not alone, He is right next to us and in us.

Perhaps today you are at a total loss as to how to pray, and feeling weak and weary. Be encouraged because Romans tells us that the Spirit Himself prays, pleading on our behalf, making up for our shortcomings and deficiencies as we pray, and helps us in our weakness.

Mandy Scott "PrayerNet"
prayernetsa@confessingcongregations.com
prayernet@confessingcongregations.com

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. (Isaiah 58:12)

This is the ACC

Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

Our logo

The cross and the Bible speak of our faith in Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture.

The UCA's "Forward Together" version of the dove and flame underlines our desire to offer our conviction and action within the UCA and for its benefit. The intertwined "C"s symbolise our confession of Christ and the congregational basis of our formation.

Working nationally

Six commissions enable the ACC to speak and work with expertise nationally. Resources from each commission are on the confessingcongregations.com website.

- **Doctrine and Theology:** develops doctrinal and theological resources for the ACC. Convenor: Associate Professor Rosalie Hudson
- **Discipleship and Evangelism:** encourages and equips people to confess afresh Christ in our time and culture. Convenor: Revd Derek Schiller

- **Social Responsibility:** seeks to revitalise the church's theology and practice in the area of social responsibility. Convenor: Revd Ross Carter
- **Ecumenical:** liaises with similar reform organisations as ACC. Convenor: Rev Dr Alan Crawford
- **Cross Cultural:** ensures indigenous and migrant ethnic congregations can confidently participate in the life of the ACC.
- **Networks Development:** supports and resources local initiatives

What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers

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

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

We are willing to come to your church, or visit you personally, wherever you live.

For further information contact ccoffice@confessingcongregations.com

Office: 2 Erskineville Rd, Newtown NSW 2042 Phone 02 9550 5358
Website: confessingcongregations.com

Getting ACCatalyst

Subscription to *ACCatalyst* is part of an ACC supporting membership for \$60.00 per year. Member congregations or groups that subscribe to the ACC also receive *ACCatalyst* at their local church.

ACC has a regularly updated website at www.confessingcongregations.com You can download a membership form under "the Assembly" tag.

ACCatalyst subscriptions for non-members are available from accoffice@confessingcongregations.com

What happens next:

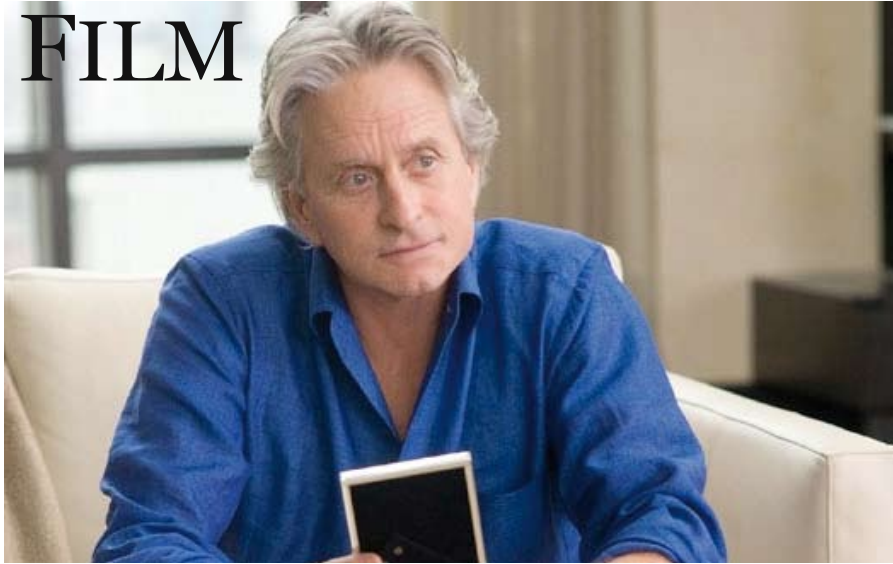
- Friday 7th January 2011: Reverend Ian Weeks, the Convenor of the NSW ACC Movement, will be inducted to the placement at Belrose Uniting Church, 7.30 pm.
- April 2, 2011: NSW ACC AGM at Sutherland UC, 10.45 am.
- April 16, 2011: Annual Wesley Institute Seminar, Speaker: Dr Craig Keener, Duke University, USA.
- August 29–31: Oxygen 11, the First National Conference for Pastors and Leaders, in Redfern, Sydney. Speaker —John Piper (ACC has been invited to join this event organised by the Katoomba Christian Convention) www.kcc.org.au/Piper
- September 8–10, 2011: ACC National Conference, at Brimbank Anglican Conference Centre (Anglican Church, East Keilor) in Melbourne. The conference commences at 1.30 pm on Thursday 8 September and concludes with lunch on Saturday 10 September 2011.

Can you consider making a Bequest to the ACC?

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

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

FILM



Michael Douglas stars as Gordon Gekko in Twentieth Century Fox 'Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps.'

So which is good: Christmas or greed?

Wall Street II – Money Never Sleeps
(2010 rated M)

At a time when shops are full of consumer goods, and we are certainly urged not to exercise restraint in spending, I thought it would be helpful to consider the sequel to the 1987 film, *Wall Street*, which won Michael Douglas an Oscar for Best Actor for his role as Gordon Gekko.

In this sequel, Michael Douglas returns as Gordon Gekko. He has been out of prison for several years now, and has published a book, *Is Greed Good*—a play on his now infamous line “Greed is Good”. It is 2008, just before the global financial crisis and the meltdown of the American economy.

The additional title “*Money Never Sleeps*” sums up the dominant role that money plays in our society. Gordon now believes he is a bit more righteous than most of the people presently reaping financial rewards in the American financial juggernaut. At a book launch in an illuminating and confronting address he remarks “Someone reminded me I once said ‘Greed is good’. Now it seems it’s legal. Because everyone is drinking the same Kool Aid.”

In 2008 time has caught up with Gordon Gekko, and he now wants to repair his relationship with his estranged daughter Winnie (Carey Mulligan), who just happens to be in a relationship with trader Jake Moore

played by Shia LeBeouf. Jake is more of an enlightened 21st century financier, as evidenced by his interest in alternate energy sources. For Gordon, everyone is viewed with a little suspicion, “You know what they say, ‘Parents are the bone on which children sharpen their teeth’”.

Gordon’s self interest is still dominant, always ready to come to his own defence, even if he has admitted his faults. One cannot help but believe Winnie when she finds out that Gordon has connected with Jake, and says “He’s not who you think he is Jake!”

There are many twists and turns in this adult drama, including references to real-life events when the financial crisis hits, and different characters appear in solid supporting roles, but the theme of this gentler sequel is certainly relationships and values, versus money and power. As Gordon Gekko says, “It’s not about the money. It’s about the game between people.”

A Christmas Snow (2010 rated PG)

A new Christian DVD also centres on relationships and family at the sometimes disturbing time of Christmas. Catherine Mary Stewart plays Kathleen, owner of a popular restaurant, who is written up in the local newspaper as the “Gourmet Grinch”.

She is portrayed as a Christmas denigrator—Christmas is not to be enjoyed at all costs. We find out early

in the film that this view is all related to her experience as a young girl when her father walked out on her family on Christmas Eve, never to return.

There are some wonderful little Christmas-time references that drive her mad—the general happiness of people at this time, giving to good causes, and Christmas greetings, even in stores when people wish you Merry Christmas—she would rather tell them where to go.

Cameron Ten Napel plays Lucy, the ten-year-old daughter of her male friend Andrew, a widower wanting a new relationship. Lucy is not at all impressed by this woman who she thinks is trying to take the place of her mother.

Kathleen is also not keen to really develop a relationship with Lucy, but this situation all changes when she is asked to look after Lucy when the regular baby sitter is unavailable during the pre-Christmas break and Andrew has to go away. Due to two different events she meets and then



befriends Sam, played by well-known character actor Muse Watson (Gibb’s mentor in the TV series NCIS), a loner type of stranger and yet an oddly contented figure.

It is around these three people that the story turns, simply because of the weather as they are “trapped” inside the house, including a period without electricity. Christian messages are clearly depicted within the drama of the film, arising from Lucy’s rehearsing of her part in a Christmas play and the involvement of the others.

There is some uneven production and acting, though one can forgive this in the context, and the simplicity about some of the portrayals, notably the girl’s character will probably resonate with families. Certainly it raises helpful questions about this time of the year, as the focus is not on presents, drinking and eating, but forgiveness and new life. It certainly encouraged me to be a little bit more sensitive toward people at Christmas time, especially shop assistants.

Peter Bentley

GIVEAWAY: Readers can get a free copy of this movie by emailing john@eternity.biz Supplies are limited. A big thankyou to www.movieschangepeople.com