

ACC Catalyst

ASSEMBLY OF CONFESSING CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



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EDITORIAL

Seeking a sign

Readers of ACCatalyst are far too well-behaved to have visited the “Church sign maker” at www.says-it.com/churchsigns, so let me describe what it does. It offers a selection of sample photos of Church Signs, generally picturing a church sign with moveable letters. You can type in whatever words you wish to add and get a realistic looking picture. It offers a chance to make mischief.

But let me assure you that the church sign pictures of Assembly of Confessing Congregation member churches in a picture spread in this

edition of ACCatalyst have not been modified with the “Church Sign maker”. They are all real.

Which means the “assembly” is also real. The ACC as a group will meet for the first time in Heaven. But in many small ways, church signs, magazines, statements on important issues the ACC stands together in the present age.

Let’s go further. Why don’t you take a moment to pray for the churches featured in our picture spread?

John Sandeman

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About pestering

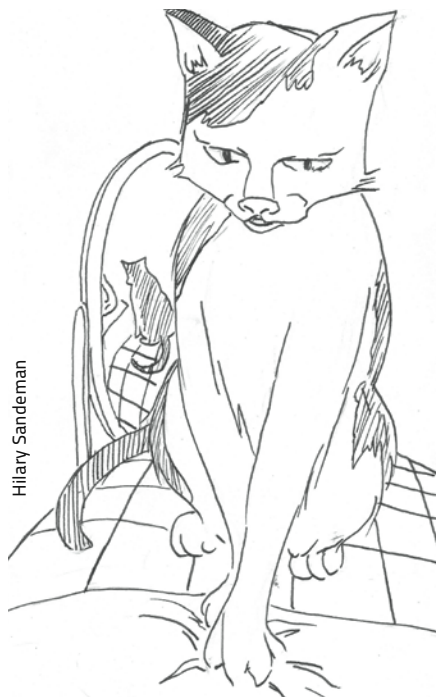
It was four o’clock in the morning and Rubey wanted to go outside. I don’t know why; it was cold out there, but for Rubey it was important. She jumped on my bed and started meowing. I tried hard not to wake up. But Rubey is very persistent. She walked over my tummy and then came up really close to my face. “Meow!”

I pushed her off the bed. For a few minutes she retreated to ponder the situation, then she returned with greater urgency, “MEOW!”

“Shut up, Rubey” I mumbled. She meowed again. This continued for about an hour until finally I couldn’t put up with it any more. I got out of bed and opened the door and out she went, feeling victorious.

I, on the other hand, returned to bed feeling so irritated with her that I could not sleep and felt that I had lost a battle.

Pestering is not always a good idea, but in some circumstances it pays off. Jesus, in Luke chapter 18, told a



story about a widow who pestered a judge. This judge didn’t care about her or her situation, but she kept

coming to him day after day asking for justice.

In the end the judge did what she asked so she would give him some peace.

And this is Jesus’ conclusion to the story:

“Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.”

So we are invited not just to pray, but to pester God with our prayers! It seems funny, doesn’t it? After all, I am sure God hears us the first time we ask him for something. But it seems that God likes us to stick at it and show that we are fairdinkum.

In Paul’s letters, he talks about “wrestling in prayer” and I guess that is a similar idea, sticking at it, persisting in it until God gives an answer. Of course pestering God takes time and perseverance on our part. Are we willing to commit to pestering God? *Robyn*



Lester Vincent



Shane Kammermann and Ian Weeks, and the conference gathers for a session

Examining truth, faith and freedom in a hostile world

Report on the ACC Conference held in Sydney 11-13 September

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations (within the Uniting Church in Australia) held its annual Conference and AGM in a UC conference centre near Chatswood in Sydney.

The theme was “Truth, Faith and Freedom in a Hostile World”. This proved to be a gripping topic with speakers elaborating on the progressive loss of religious freedoms in Australia and the increasing persecution of Christians around the world.

ACC’s National Chair, Rev Shane Kammermann (formerly of Coromandel Uniting), set the tone of the Conference in his address at the opening worship. He explained that the ‘Yes’ of God in the gospel had a ‘No’ in it to apostasy and the old life of sin.

Excellent Bible Studies were provided on the two mornings of the conference by Dr Geoff Aernie from the UC theological college in Sydney. His theme was Faith and Truth in Mark’s Gospel.

Professor Patrick Parkinson spoke of the expanding reach of anti-discrimination law, and the contraction of religious freedom to freedom of worship.

Rev. Peter Kurti from the Centre for Independent Studies said that,

while recent aggressive secularism was working to remove religion from the public arena, a truly secular society had its roots in Christianity, and true equality of persons came from the biblical doctrine of humanity created in the image of God.

Seminars were held on the themes Preaching Today (with Rev Rick Dacey from Wesley Mission), Cross-Cultural Ministry (led by Rev Dr Hedley Fihaki), and Living for Christ in a Sex-Drunk World (Rev Kamal Weerakoon).

The speaker for the Conference Rally was Pastor Fred Selahi who brought with him three fellow Iranians from Adelaide and a number from Sydney. Fred told the moving and amazing story of his coming to Christ and his coming to Australia from persecution in Malaysia. An offering was taken for the persecuted church and as a result \$750 will be given to the Barnabus Fund and \$750 to Christian Faith and Freedom.

The ACC Tongan contingent created a novel opportunity for an offering towards ACC with a traditional Tongan dance. The offering amounted to \$2252.

On the final morning of the Conference, Elizabeth Kendal from Christian Faith and Freedom gave a stunning overview of the persecuted church worldwide and the devastating onslaught of militant Islam.

Her passionate call to Christians in Australia to stand with their suffering brothers and sisters made a deep impression on all of us at the Conference.

During the AGM sessions there was an extended discussion time exploring what might happen at the UCA National Assembly in Perth in July 2015 with respect to the Uniting Church’s doctrine of marriage. It was reported that the ACC responses to the discussion paper on Marriage had been widely circulated and used by many congregations beyond the ACC.

It was resolved that the ACC encourage its members, clusters and congregations to join in ACC’s ministry of prayer by engaging in prayer and fasting on each Friday, and to take part in the Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting leading up to the 2015 Assembly.

Next year’s conference is scheduled for Adelaide in September, just 2 months after the National Assembly. This will be an important and decisive occasion for ACC and for many in the Uniting Church who are concerned about the marriage question.

Overall this conference was inspiring and fulfilling. It is a pity that distances in our vast land limit the number who can attend from interstate. *Shirley and Rod James*



ctsale / istockphoto.com

PUBLIC SQUARE

BY PSEUDO-MAXIMUS

Death defying

In "A society in denial of death" (*The Age*, Nov 1, p35) Suzy Freeman-Greene bemoans the euphemistic treatment of death in a society saturated with news reports of death. Grief doesn't follow the two-day compassionate leave schedule for "moving on". Nor can its wearers relate to irrelevant chatter or smiling sales girls blithely urging them 'to have a great day.'

She suggests reviving the tradition of mourners wearing black to alert others that, beneath the fake *joie de vie* of a culture which sees it as a colour of good taste, many of us are suffering inexpressible sadness. A good idea to jolt us out of complacency and encourage greater empathy.

But the saddest note is sounded in her approving observation that secular services do "a lovely line in funerals ... while removing God from the equation". The removal of God from death is the ultimate 'denial' that our finite, fragile and flawed lives are gifts of grace destined for perfection in the glorious purposes of the world's Creator and Redeemer.

Sadly, the church, too, does little to help us face its grim reality. We speak of "passing away" instead of dying, and put our hope in the "immortality of the soul" instead of the "redemption of our bodies".

Increasingly, services of thanksgiving in churches are held without the coffin and are followed by anonymous burial or cremation - mourners desperate to avoid the finality of their loss.

We should do better. All Saints Day (Nov 1) reminds us that we belong to the Body of Christ. We may face the grim reality of death, properly mourn

those whom we love, and rejoice in hope because God's love for us has been embodied in his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Unfashionably pro-life

One of the ironies of political life is that the Greens, a party committed to sustaining the natural environment, doesn't believe that life formed naturally in the womb must be sustained. It is refreshing, therefore, to find Emma Meconi's recent piece, "It's unfashionable but I choose to be pro-life" (*Weekend Australian* Nov 1-2 p21). A self-confessed 'Green leftie,' she argues that decisions about abortion shouldn't be made "simply with a doctor's permission slip" but only with "full knowledge of the consequences" and after consultation with "family, friends, loved ones and the fellow involved".

While her "view is not moulded by religious belief", her reasons for passionately upholding "the rights of the unborn baby" are powerful testimony to the Gospel of Life. "Seeing the delight, laughter and richness children add to our lives, whether we are ready for them or not, is inspiring."

One hopes that the National Assembly's Uniting in Justice Working Group will be similarly inspired to produce material to help UCA members defend the rights of the unborn and resist the clamour to elevate individual choice above the lives of the voiceless. Its long silence on the tyranny of abortion, and the absence of pastoral care for women who have had abortions, is a curious anomaly in a church committed to social justice and fairness for the vulnerable.

Short-on Marriage Equality

Leader of the Federal Opposition, Bill Shorten, recently spoke in support of same-sex marriage at a forum held by the Australian Christian Lobby (*The Age*, Oct 25 pp6-7). Basing his views on charity and tolerance, he said that he has always tried to "answer the Christian call to care for the vulnerable, to speak up for the voiceless, to reject hatred and intolerance, to help the poor and to pursue peace."

He is particularly offended by people who use the Bible to 'insult' and 'demonise' others on the basis of their sexuality. "When I hear people allege that 'God tells them' that marriage equality is the first step on the road to polygamy and bigamy and bestiality, I cannot stay silent. I do not agree."

Thus he invokes the now common practice of maligning and intimidating people who do not 'insult' or 'demonise' others, but have good reasons in Christian ethics and natural law to uphold male-female marriage. Moreover, like many proponents of same-sex marriage, he fails to see the logic of his own argument. If based purely on compassion and tolerance, it is hard to see how a range of other life-long sexual unions can be excluded in future. Presumably, bestiality would be excluded, but only if we resist the view of Australian ethicist Peter Singer that the distinction between humans and animals is a form of 'speciesism.'

Unholy Matrimony

Robert Dessaix's article in *The Age*, *Good Weekend* (Nov 1 p38) should give advocates of 'Marriage Equal-

ity' reason to pause. In a long-term relationship with his male partner, he is "baffled by the campaign for gay marriage". Once homosexuals were proud of being different, not "equal."

In a chillingly honest and hedonistic assessment of GLBT culture, he says: "The one marvellous thing about being homosexual in the West over the past few decades is that you have been free to love and be loved - for a season, forever, deeply, sexually, asexually, emotionally, faithfully, promiscuously, wildly, gently, in a couple, a threesome, a foursome, however it suits you - without getting married. Now, in a growing number of countries, homosexuals are also being threatened with marriage and its discontents."

Dessaix's candour makes Shorten's dismissal of claims about the slippery-slope look very naive. And he raises serious questions about the naivety of churches. First, by challenging the idea that different sexual preferences are biologically fixed, he debunks the idea that sexual preference is genetically predetermined. Second, by elevating 'choice' above biology, social tradition and theology, he debunks the idea that the law can set limits to sexual relationships.

The question for the UCA as she prepares for the Fourteenth Assembly in July 2015 is whether 'equality' (based on biology) and/or 'choice' (based on individual will) are sufficient grounds on which to make decisions about marriage.

The new inquisition

Brendan O'Neill (*The Weekend Australian*, Oct 25-26 p22) has a good nose for hypocrisy. He sees radically different responses to two recent high profile cases in which public figures have had their private lives exposed by the media. The case involving the publication of risqué photos of actresses was greeted with global condemnation of the hackers; while the exposure of a University of Sydney lecturer involving inappropriate comments about various groups brought him condemnation.

The details of the cases need not detain us here. The behaviour of the individuals exposed and the means of exposing them were tacky, to say the least. What is of much wider public concern is the vehemence with which the present incarnation of self-appointed 'thought police' pursue their prey. They have 'an incredibly authoritarian instinct to rid the public realm of anyone whose outlook is not 100 per cent pure and decent, as defined

by the new self-styled guardians of moral probity: so called progressives, with righteousness in their hearts and rotten tomatoes in their hands.'

The public shaming of those whose private views are politically incorrect should concern a church that prides itself on being progressive. Tolerance and fairness are noble, but not ultimate, goals of faith and social action.

The question for the UCA is whether our public policies are more aligned with politically correct causes than the Gospel of Life embodied in Christ. The fact that orthodox Christians are now more often shamed behind official closed doors than in public only increases concern that tolerance hides an intolerance of the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church .

IAN CLARKSON

Salty Speech

Our everyday words are to be instruments of righteousness. The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom. We are warned everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. There are some phrases Christians are taking up that are just plain worldly and we should take stock.

Here's one: "o-m-g". It sounds cheap, lazy and unbecoming on the lips of those whose speech is to be seasoned by the Holy Spirit. It seems to have come from the American mid-day soapiers with bouffant blondes screeching their "O my g-d's" at the most inconsequential stimuli. Maybe it takes the place of using the Messiah's title as an expletive and in a way that is back-hand acknowledgement since no one bothers to use Mohammed or Hindu demi-gods in such a way.

Another one to get rid of is "to be honest, blah blah". I feel like replying; "OK so what you have hitherto said is 'B' grade truth, but now you want me to take note". Look, all that a follower of Christ says should be honest and truthful. .

And then there is "I don't mean to be nasty-but", or "I don't mean to sound like I'm gossiping-but!" The truth, or at least the real intent always comes after the "but". What comes after the "but" is mostly nasty and mostly gossip.

Remember our Lord Jesus speaks well of us before the Father. So we might let His Spirit lead us in speaking well of each other. I suspect, more damage has been done to children's views of church hearing their parents having roast minister for Sunday lunch or bagging other members than anything else. What a discipline this is!

Another cousin to this one is "I really feel guilty about-etc, etc." The fact is there is usually no guilt at all, at best awkwardness, embarrassment and usually that subtle virus we all carry, looking for another massage of our self-justifying ego with an "Oh no, you shouldn't feel guilty".

Next to this is the more spiritual "God told me" or the more nuanced "I sense the Lord is saying to me to tell you". We should desist such efforts at spiritual smartness and just say it. Others can and will judge how likely it has come from the holy place.

But I have another example with which few will probably agree - it's the word "create". We use it all the time. Microsoft brought it to parlance. We create a document or some configuration on the screen, save it and refer to it as "I created". Wrong! We make, develop, construct, produce or procreate. We never can or shall create. The word means "to bring out of nothing". The Hebrew word it translates in Scripture is never used of anything humans devise, only what God does. Maybe we can be 'creative', a slightly different sense of the word. Let's acknowledge in humility our limitations and honour the Living God with words fitting His glory.

Of course there are many others. "Amazing". If a quality chocolate is amazing what is God's grace? We should control our hyperbole.

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt. Wise choices of words and idioms are opportunities to honour our Lord, who intercedes for us. And let there be plenty of thanksgiving! We can impact the world through what we say. And don't say!

Marriage, Suter, Polspeak

Marriage in Focus

Thank you to all the ACC member congregations and groups who responded to the UCA Assembly Discussion Paper on Marriage. ACC has received copies from a number of congregations, but if you have not yet sent a copy to the ACC office for its information and the interest of our own Task Group on Marriage (TG), please let me know. We owe a great deal to the hard work of the Convenor of the ACC Task Group, Rev Dr Max Champion and the members: Rev Ross Carter (Melbourne; Discipleship & Theology (D & T) Commission); Rev Clive Skewes (Melbourne; D & T); Rev Jonathon Button (Port Augusta, SA; D & T); Rev Shane Kammermann (Cairns, Qld; D & T); Rev Lulu Senituli (Bayside, Qld; Co-opted member for TG); Rev Anne Hibbard (Liverpool, NSW; Co-opted member for TG); Katherine Abetz (Poatina, Tasmania; Co-opted member for TG).

Keith Suter on the Future of the UCA

In this edition of *ACCatalyst* we publish a summary comment from Keith based on scenarios or possibilities he considers for the future of the ACC. Copies of the full the-

sis (367 pages) in PDF format are available from Keith, or if you are not able to access the listed website, please contact the ACC office. It is helpful for people to read this short article and reflect in the final 6 months before the Assembly – What is the future for the Uniting Church in Australia? At the time of the 14th Assembly it will be 38 years in existence. It would be interesting to hear from members about their reflections about the church, the changes and ethos and their experience.

From the near past – Peter Bentley continues his series originally published in the Reforming Alliance newsletter *Reforming* March 2006, No. 12 “There is nothing new under the sun”.

Political Speak 4. “People need to understand the Bible better.”

This is perhaps a not so subtle way of saying, “you have got it completely wrong and you will be educated until you get it right”. I am aware that we all need to understand the bible better. It is purely astounding arrogance that promotes the view that the ‘theologically liberal’ approach is the best or only approach. I believe it would now be helpful for those on the ‘theologically liberal side’ to

either admit that there is intellectual foundation for the evangelical and reformed approach to Scripture, or to publicly inform our membership in a more direct way that they do not think so. At present, the language used, like the sentence “People need to understand the Bible better”, makes a mockery of the supposed idea that there are two (or even more) valid positions in the church.

Political Speak No. 7 “We listen!”

Yes, there has been a great deal of listening going on. Sometimes it is good to actually act on what people say, or at least let people know that no matter how much is said, it will not make any difference. Rather than more listening, what is needed is brutal honesty. Church members need to know the whole agenda for the future of the Uniting Church, rather than listen to more political-speak.

Political Speak No. 8 “People are really not sure.”

While there is a group within the church who are not sure when questioned about matters of sexuality, the overall opposition to liberalisation of standards for sexual practice within the Uniting Church has been plainly evident to anyone who has read survey material over the last ten years. It is evident to me from my research and contacts that Synod and area differences are very important in terms of the position of the membership of a local congregation. Also significant is the influence of the minister, and people may be interested to learn that it is actually the lay members with traditional viewpoints who are more suppressed by their ‘theologically liberal’ ministers, and as a consequence are now the ones who are probably becoming less sure. This should not surprise anyone who is familiar with the overt orientation of the leadership in the UCA. There should be an honest and up-front statement from the Uniting Church to clearly outline why the church does not want to listen to the voices of the majority of members on this particular matter, when in the past it had always done so.

Peter Bentley

LETTER

Dear Sirs

In reference to the ongoing saga about same-sex marriage I fail to see the relevance of this discussion on this subject, or whatever you may wish to call it. WHY do you wish to continue with this subject?

If you agree, as I do, that Scripture is GOD given and is always correct and no man could/should be able to, or want to, change it, why do you consider doing it now? Revelation states this, regarding change in 22:18,19. How can you disregard this?

As I have said before, my understanding of Scripture is that GOD does not support such a move.

I have just been reading on how

SATAN wishes to destroy Christianity. One of his ways is to ease his way into Church activities and quietly and secretly cause mischief there so that the Christians within that Church become so confused that they are not aware of what is going on and so drift to become followers of SATAN and not GOD.

While the hierarchy of the UCA appears to want to molycoddle those who wish to change Scripture so as to appease them, then I feel that I can no longer remain a member of the Uniting Church in Australia.

*Yours faithfully,
Harold Ayton,
UCA Ulverstone, Tas*

Environmental care is a mission

Professor Howell, Dean of Research and Senior Research Fellow of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute (ACI) in Ghana has identified caring for the environment as one of 'Five Marks of Mission' in a talk given at Camperdown Stanmore Community Church (CSCC) on Sunday 6th July, as she addressed those gathered for a Worship & Seminar Day organised by ACC's "Caring for the Creation Working Group" (CCWG).

ACI is a theological university taking postgraduate students through Ph.D courses. Professor Howell (Allison), while on leave in Australia, kindly gave of her time to speak at morning worship and an afternoon seminar session on "Caring for the Creation".

The 5 marks of mission, according to Allison are: (1) Proclaim the Good News (2) Teach, baptise and nurture believers (3) Respond to human needs by loving service (4) Seek to transform unjust structures in society, and (5) Strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth.

Allison referred to Colossians 1:15-20 in describing 5 dimensions of reconciliation through Christ - reconciliation with God, self, others, Creation and within Creation: a restoration of relationships described as broken in Genesis through the Fall. Human responsibility goes beyond stewardship. Our responsibility is to act in the world on God's behalf. The Greek *oikos* (=house/home) is the root of 'ecumenical,' 'ecology' and 'economy,' so all these are related.

A perceived deficiency in the



Allison Howell

Church's traditional ways of proclamation, according to Allison, is that proclamation has been centred only on humans.

Allison described how the ACI works with church leaders and the community to tackle environmental problems in Ghana as best they can. These problems include the poisoning of rivers through illegal gold mining, the felling of native forests, burning of the bush, soil erosion, the accumulation of plastics, particularly in cities, the impacts of global warming on sea-level rise and on losses in crop productivity. The Institute works with the media where possible to educate and alert people to problems.

After Allison's helpful talk, Nola Stewart (Convener of the CCWG and a former deaconess and Science teacher) conducted a Bible Study in groups, using the booklet, "Caring for the Creation," then introduced the idea of 'carrying capacity' as an

accepted measure within the community, e.g. as it refers to public transport, ferries and the like or else the number of sheep a farmer calculates is right for a paddock, to develop thinking about what numbers of people are 'right' for a country or for the world, when it comes to providing resources necessary for human life, whilst also providing healthy habitats for other species. Recent calculations by scientists, Nola said, show that human numbers have been unsustainable since at least 1986 - that we now need 1.5 'Earths'. This rate of average consumption per capita also makes no provision for species other than humans, and is an anthropocentric (human-centred) measure. Such a level of consumption by the over 7 billion humans on Earth is currently being 'sustained' by eating into 'capital' instead of 'living off interest' - the reproductive bounty provided by Earth's forests, fish, food crops, fibre production etc., are now being used faster than it can be renewed naturally. We need to compensate by encouraging smaller family sizes globally, as well as reducing per capita consumption, Nola said.

A big "Thank you" to Rev Dr Peter Davis, who led the morning Worship and Communion Service and to the team at CSCC, including Joy and Graeme Lacey, for the smooth running of the Seminar and the wonderful lunch provided at no cost.

May God be praised for answered prayer for the Seminar, including its helpful outcomes.

Nola Stewart Convener, CCWG



The future of the

Well-known speaker and Uniting Church member, DR KEITH SUTER provides a brief reflection based on his recent PhD thesis.

Scenario planning is a secular business technique for thinking about how the future could evolve. It is not about making predictions or about devising an ideal future towards which one should work.

Instead, the technique encourages people to think more broadly about the possible changes that could occur. It reduces the risk of being taken by surprise by providing warning signs and encouraging the creation of contingency plans.

It can be controversial because it highlights matters that people, particularly at the top of organisations, may prefer to ignore. It can also be uncomfortable because the author is obliged to write material which may not be in accordance with the author's own views but which is none the less suggested by the analytical framework that underpins the technique. This is not always a technique for the faint-hearted (which helps explain the reluctance in many organisations to use it).

I have just completed a Ph.D at the University of Sydney on how the Uniting Church could evolve. Four possible scenarios are presented. Each scenario needs a memorable name to encourage people to remember the scenarios and to look for the warning signs:

1. "Word and Deed" examines how the Uniting Church could become a church of a small number of large parishes providing both spiritual activities and social welfare. The city and regional missions currently provide an example. This Uniting Church could evolve from the amalgamation and consolidation of many existing small and declining congregations. As they say in farming: "Get big or get out".

2. "Secular Welfare" examines how the Uniting Church could let the congregations just fade away and instead focus on the provision of social welfare (albeit derived from a Christian tradition). Much of the work of the existing Uniting Church is already focused on social welfare and this emphasis is growing, while the congregations are in decline. Most Australians who have contact with the existing Uniting Church do so via Uniting Church agencies (such as in aged or child care) rather than the congregations.

3. "Return to the Early Church" examines how the Uniting Church could reinvent itself along the lines of the first three centuries of the Christian church. This scenario taps into the "emerging church movement" and sees a Uniting Church that is sick of the commercial

corporate ethos that underpins much of the government-financed social welfare work. It no longer wants to work for Caesar and wants to return to the zeal of the missionary era of the first three centuries (before the faith conquered the Roman Empire – or the Empire conquered the faith). It recognises (as did the early Christians) that it is competing in a market place of many faiths.

4. "Recessional" examines how the Uniting Church could be wound up and its assets dispersed. This scenario examines how the Uniting Church is trying to operate in an increasingly secular society; there is no hostility towards it; it is simply treated with disdain by a population who can see no relevance in its work for them.

Under this scenario the Uniting Church could just wither away, and fritter away its resources. It should therefore devise an exit strategy for a coherent wind-up with the remaining resources being used in ways that reflect Christian stewardship (such as assisting the rapidly expanding churches in the Global South).

Scenario planning in a business organisation consists of two halves. Scenarios are devised in the first part of the operation (as above). In the second half,



Uniting Church

the scenarios are presented to the CEO and board (or whoever commissioned the work) and contingency plans are devised in readiness for the scenarios (or a variation thereof) coming into effect.

But the Uniting Church does not have a real CEO and board. It has a variety of councils that provide discussion but generate few concrete binding decisions. There is no

overall sense of national direction. While Uniting Church members may be aware of the decline of the Uniting Church, there is no one central point of focus to generate new ways of thinking and the creation of options. Instead there is just a slow chipping away and erosion.

The dissertation's final chapter therefore argues that the Uniting Church has fundamental organisational problems. This helps explain all the "restructures" that have taken place – but the restructures have been localised and lacked a coherent national strategy. The dissertation provides some ideas for a communications strategy.

The dissertation is being made available without charge (as a soft copy) to anyone who would like it [see website below]. The intention is to help provoke discussion on the deeper challenges facing the Uniting Church.

Keith Suter

Managing Director

World of Thinking

www.churchfutures.com.au

The views expressed in the article are those of the author and not necessarily any part of the Uniting Church with which he has been associated.



To speak up - or not speak up, that is the question

GEORGE GLANVILLE is determined not to stay silent

Recently I sat at the feet of Patrick Parkinson, Professor of Law at the University of Sydney, who spoke on the topic Religious Freedom in a Hostile World. Patrick is the founder of 'Freedom 4 Faith'. He is an evangelical Christian.

Among other things, Patrick spoke of the expanding reach of anti-discrimination legislation, a gentle wave that has the capacity to become a tsunami.

The fundamental value behind this development is an unswerving commitment to human rights in general and individual rights in particular. It is an ideology that now claims the high moral ground.

With the demise of Christendom and the silencing, even ridicule, of Christian beliefs in the public square, religious arguments carry little or no weight.

With regard to the same-sex marriage debate, for example, individual rights and equality rights trump all other rights. Non-judgementalism in lifestyle choices has become a foundational moral value. In the name of tolerance, intolerance of alternative value systems is increasingly the accepted norm.

How do Christians committed to God's view of what is best for people respond to this seismic shift?

In his talk, Patrick made the following observations - In Australia, it appears that we are moving towards a monoculturalism dictated by the views of the majority (or the loudest, most influential voices - my comment) where eventually, there will be no concessions to faith-based groups (i.e. all exemptions will be removed as time goes on). However, we also have a history of respect for freedom of conscience on significant moral issues e.g., pacifism and trade union membership. We have a history of respect for basic human rights including freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of association, freedom to marry and have children and to choose the education that best suits etc. according to a person's religious and moral convictions. These rights need to be balanced with non-discrimination in a diverse, multicultural society such as ours otherwise so called tolerance and non-judgementalism become totalitarianism.

I'm quite impressed with Tim Wilson, Human Rights Commissioner appointed by the Abbott Government. He strongly asserts the importance of four foundational human rights - what he calls 'the forgotten freedoms': freedom of association, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of property. His is a Classical Liberal perspective - the role of human rights is

to protect individuals from encroachment and abuse of power by governments. He is deeply committed to the rights of individuals and believes, for example, that the Government should keep out of the marriage issue. He supports civil unions rather than marriage for gays and is very concerned for the moral sensibilities of religious people on this issue. Tim Wilson himself is gay and has a gay partner.

You may have read Karl Faase's article in the Sept. 2014 edition of *Eternity* - A topic too hot to touch. He suggests three reasons why the church is largely silent on the issue of gay marriage: an over-emphasis on God's love, a fear of opposing a movement that is considered just by many well-meaning people and the fear of being unpopular. There may be another reason - we just don't care enough.

It seems to me that we should be praying and speaking up about gay marriage out of love for our neighbour, that is, for the sake of our society at large, for the sake of gay men and women, for the sake of adolescents exploring their sexual identity and for the sake of children. To elucidate however, would require another article.

The Australian Christian Lobby this week thanked the 42,000 people who signed their online submission to the Senate enquiry which has now recommended not to pass the Green's bill recognising overseas same-sex marriage.

This morning I signed another online submission to Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations in the hope of ensuring that the abolition of modern slavery is prioritised in the Sustainable Development Goals under discussion at the U.N. right now. This submission is an initiative of Walk Free, a movement of people everywhere fighting to end one of the world's insidious evils - slavery, which particularly involves the abusive slavery of women and children.

There are many noble and urgent causes to keep a Christian busy. It is not always easy to choose let alone get involved. But pray, choose and get involved we must - for the Lord's sake and for our neighbours' sake. In so doing, it is a wonderful privilege to be presented with so many timely opportunities to speak to people about the hope we have in the Lord Jesus - for now, for tomorrow and for all our tomorrows.

George Glanville is an ACC member and a former Principal of Tyndale Christian School.



The glory of God

ROWAN GILL on the history of our god who shines

Bill Holladay, Old Testament Professor in Boston and I were viewing the sunset one day at Andover Newton Theological School. "Ah," he said, "Yahweh is still doing it." He was referring to God in the cloud. The Shekinah.

"The Lord is the King of Glory". (Psalm 24:10) *"The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens."* (Psalm 113:4)

The mystics sought the vision of God and may have achieved it. They led the church towards its chief goal – the glory of God in worship. Moses was allowed only to see God's "back". According to another tradition, Moses had to veil his face when speaking to people because he had seen the glory of God on the mountain.

God led the people of God out of Egyptian slavery in the Exodus towards the Promised Land, the pillar of cloud leading them by day, the fire by night.

When Samuel and King Saul were arguing about the kingship, whose kingship God had rejected, Samuel said *"Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not mortal that he should change his mind"* (1 Samuel 15:29).

When Isaiah was converted in the temple, at a recognisable date (in the year that King Uzziah died), he saw the glory of God in the angelic presence. The angels administered to him and said *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts/the whole earth is full of his glory"* (Isaiah 6:3).

The Lord says to the people, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1)

At the nativity of Jesus 'in that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them *"Do not be afraid; for see – I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."* And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those
whom he favours!"* (Luke 2:8-14)

The Transfiguration of Jesus in the New Testament has Jesus enveloped and shining in the cloud. Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah from the Old Testament. The glory of God allows Jesus to speak to the others about his 'decease' which is to occur at Jerusalem; 'decease' can also be 'exodus' in the Greek. So in his glory Jesus was indicating the glory at Jerusalem with the cross reaching right back to the earliest human witness.

Of the unidentified woman who bathed him in perfume



Sunbeams on St. Maria Church, Brussels

and her tears (she knew something about worship), Jesus said; *"Truly I say to you today, whenever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."* (Matthew 26:13)

To the two who walked to Emmaus on the resurrection day the then-hidden Jesus said: "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26).

At his martyrdom Stephen *"filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God"*. (Acts 8:55)

Hans Kung dedicated his big book on God's existence *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (to the greater glory of God).

In subordination to God the church is the glory of God. The church may have failed in many ways, but she is still God's glory. The foundation stone of every church has inscribed: *"Erected to the glory of God, etc. etc."* *"Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God."* (John Newton)

Irenaeus said in the early church: *Gloria Dei est vivens homo* (the glory of God is human beings fully alive).

Calvin said that nature was "the theatre of God's glory". *"The whole earth is full of God's glory."* (Isaiah 6:3)

"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations but nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (Revelation 21:22-27)

"Its a strange glory, the glory of this God." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

A good friend of mine travelled the long distance to Chicago to hear Karl Barth on his American tour. Barth's English was not good as he had learnt it reading detective novels going to bed, but before he had finished my friend was aware of the glory of God suffusing everything.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

United Methodist discipline crisis

Frank Schaeffer, a United Methodist Minister, who performed a marriage of his son in a same sex union, will remain a clergyman. In the last twelve months Schaeffer has been frocked, defrocked and refrocked. Now the United Methodist Church's top court has upheld an earlier ruling that had reinstated his clergy credentials.

The Church trials started in November 2013 when a church trial suspended Schaeffer for 30 days and asked him whether he could uphold the denominations "Book of Discipline".

The United Methodist church Book of Discipline still holds to marriage being only between a man and a woman despite a long campaign by mostly American-based liberals to change it.

However the United Methodist church is a multi-national church with over a third of its members living in Africa. The numbers are not there for a change. As a result Church trials of dissident clergy and a perceived trend of church leaders in the US to apply even mild penalties at all, is causing tension within the church.

Schaeffer appealed the original penalty and he was reinstated by the Northeastern Jurisdiction Committee in June (Schaeffer is based in Pennsylvania.)

The Rev. Christopher Fisher, counsel for the church of Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, appealed to the Judicial Council, the United Methodists top court, which upheld the reinstatement.

The United Methodist's evangelical group had an interesting response to the latest verdict. "It will push future trial courts in a more punitive direction," the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, spokesperson for Good News told the United Methodist News service. "Good News will continue to advocate Scriptural doctrinal and moral teachings and be a voice for those whose evangelical faith is often discounted by the leadership of this church."

The *Good News* claim that future Courts would be tougher comes

from the fact that the overturned sentence was an attempt to be kind to Schaeffer in their view, the thirty days suspension followed by an attempt to get Schaeffer to promise not to perform same-sex marriages in the future. But the higher church courts ruled that a penalty could not be conditional on a future act.

United Methodist News reported a comment by The Rev. Ted A. Campbell, Associate Professor of history at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, said the ruling does not change church law, which forbids same-gender marriages.

Campbell said he thought the court had ruled correctly that Schaeffer could not be tried for something he hadn't done, but cautioned it would be a mistake to view the ruling as a huge victory for full inclusion of LGBTQT persons in the church.

"It is not a victory for the progressive wing of the church," he said.

NZ Presbyterians support marriage of man and woman

At October's General Assembly gathering, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand upheld the historic Christian understanding of marriage as the loving, faithful union of a man and a woman.

"We are being faithful to what we understand Christ is calling us to as a Church," said Moderator of Presbyterian Church, the Right Rev Ray Coster.

During debate on the matter at General Assembly, Presbyterians urged the country's legislators not to "alter or confuse the meaning of marriage, which has always been about the union of male and female, and is of deep spiritual significance for New Zealanders of many faiths and cultures".

"The Church does not support same-sex marriage and will be making a submission to urge Parliament not to proceed with the proposed amendment to the Marriage Act," said Ray.

"There are strong feelings on either side of this issue, and we respect the range of genuinely held beliefs in our Church. We know that some people felt hurt by this decision. It is important to note that what we stand together on as a Church far outweighs the issues that divide us."

All congregations in the Presbyterian Church had the opportunity to be represented at this year's General Assembly and to participate in the debate.

"Some in the Church chose to register their dissent to this decision opposing same-sex marriage. Registering dissent is an accepted part of Presbyterian process, and is part of our tradition of open and robust debate. All members are bound by the rulings of General Assembly, even if they have registered their dissent against a decision.

"While there was support for a proposal to prohibit ministers from conducting same-sex marriage ceremonies, it narrowly failed to get the 60 percent majority required to pass into church law."

Ray said that debate on the matter reflects the same conversations that are going on in the wider community about same sex relationships, and that legislation currently before parliament has bought the matter to the fore.

Should legislation to allow same-sex marriage be passed into NZ law, ministers will have the flexibility to marry same-sex couples.

UK Methodists take a nuanced position

Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) report:

On behalf of the MET Executive Committee, a small working group has, for some time, been considering the issues surrounding the same-sex marriage debate within Methodism. We wanted to update you with the latest news following Conference, seeking to provide some clarification of the current situation, and to ask your prayers and support for the ongoing work.



The Rev. Frank Schaefer (left) listens during an oral hearing before the United Methodist Judicial Council, meeting in Memphis, Tenn. on whether an appeals committee was correct in restoring his clergy credentials after being found guilty in a church trial last November of performing a same-sex wedding ceremony for his son.

Firstly, we give thanks that the Conference upheld the Biblical understanding of marriage:

‘The Methodist Church, in line with Scripture and traditional teaching, believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God’s intention that a marriage should be a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman.’

The Conference (26 June – 3 July, 2014) did not vote to change this understanding, nor to ‘opt in’ to permit Methodist buildings to be registered for same-sex marriage ceremonies or Methodist ministers to be authorised to conduct them.

This creates the unprecedented situation in which our denomination now has a different understanding of marriage from that of the State.

Therefore, though people may choose to enter into a same-sex marriage, it cannot be recognised as such by the Church.

Secondly, some disquiet has understandably been expressed over the passing of Resolution 40/6 which states that there is no reason *per se* to prevent anyone within the Methodist Church, ordained or lay, from entering into a same-sex marriage.

Our understanding of this resolution is:

- Conference concluded, when Civil Partnerships were introduced, that we were not in a position to prohibit them because they did not necessarily involve a sexual relationship.

- The State’s Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 makes it very clear that the same is true of same-sex marriage: it does not necessarily involve a sexual relationship. Same-sex marriages cannot be annulled through lack of consummation, nor can a divorce be obtained on the grounds of adultery.

Conference determined that it was not in a position to prohibit members of the Methodist Church from entering into what the State has named a same-sex marriage.

- This resolution must therefore be understood in the light of the 1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality, number 4 of which upholds the traditional teaching of the Church, namely chastity for all outside marriage and fidelity within it. Marriage here, as in all official Methodist statements, is understood as being between one man and one woman for life.

- Though people may enter into a civil same-sex marriage, it cannot be recognised as marriage by the Church.

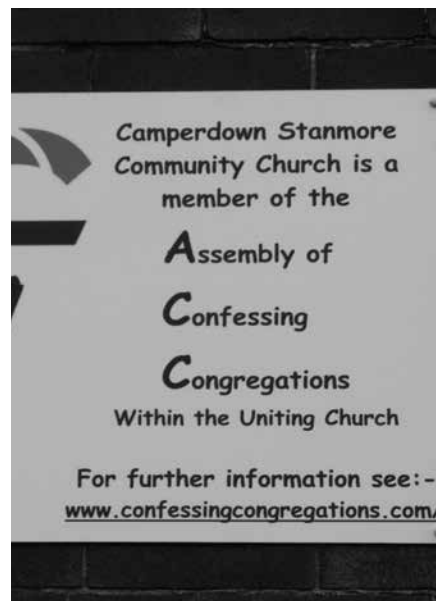
Anglican meeting features confessing movement leaders

A large scale meeting for Anglicans that will be held in Melbourne during March 2015 links the Anglican confessing movement to local leaders. “Anglican Future” is sponsored by the long established group EFAC (Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion). They are joined by the relatively new FCA (Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans) which also includes members from outside of the official Anglican Communion. Speakers include Eliud Wabukala, Primate and Archbishop of Kenya, and Chairman of the GAFCON Primates Council. GAFCON is the Global Anglican Futures Conference, a gathering of theologically conservative Anglicans which formed FCA. FCA is the Anglican version of the confessing movement.

SIGNS OF LIFE



Booragul, NSW



Camperdown-Stanmore, NSW

Signs for the Times

This spread of *ACCatalyst* features some of the local ACC member congregational signs that are displayed on the church buildings. ACC logos are available to download from the ACC website. ACC Congregations are encouraged to use the sign and as you can see people are have tailored the sign to their local situation.

There are more signs on the ACC website. If your congregation has a new ACC sign please email a photo to the ACC office. Check out the ACC website for further information as it now features a refreshed look:

www.confessingcongregations.com/

And check our more ACC signs at:
www.confessingcongregations.com/gallery/category/C50



Dorrigo, NSW



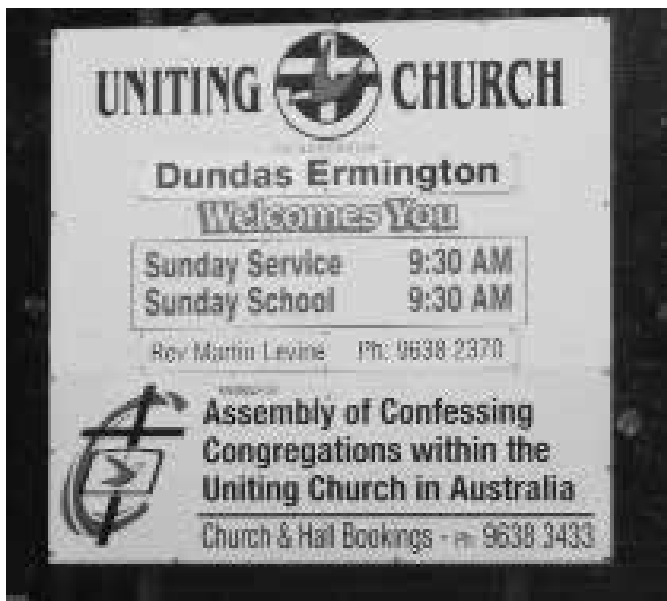
Golden Grove, SA



Nana Glen, NSW



Port Pirie SA



Dundas NSW



Ulverstone, Tas

UCA request to Access Ministries

Press release from UCA Vic/Tas Synod.

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has resolved to issue five requests to ACCESS ministries, and if not satisfied with evidence of a positive response, will withdraw as a Supporting Church from 1 July 2015.

The consequence of the Synod decision is that ACCESS ministries has 8 months to demonstrate positive responses to the following requests in order for the Church to retain its Supporting Church status:

1. A commitment to changes in the governance practices and structures that facilitate the full participation of members of the Council of Christian Education in Schools (trading as ACCESS ministries) in the policy development and direction setting of ACCESS ministries.
2. Increased and transparent communications with the General Secretary of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.
3. An inclusive and consultative approach to the development of the Special Religious Instruction (SRI) program materials, a commitment that these materials will be theologically broad and pedagogically sound and that this is reflected in the training of SRI instructors.
4. The removal of the compulsory nature of the Partnership Program payment.
5. A conversation with the UCA Centre for Theology and Ministry (CTM) about the possibility of the CTM's involvement in the training of SRI instructors.

The Synod also sought to affirm, acknowledge and thank Uniting Church members whose dedication over many years has contributed to the work of ACCESS ministries and its predecessors as CRE teachers, members, Council members and Board members.

Uniting Church SRI instructors will continue to be affirmed and supported by the Church.

The Uniting Church is deeply committed to ongoing engagement with other faith traditions and for young people to be exposed to a well-structured pedagogically sound general religious education program in the Australian curriculum. As a result, the Synod, in the same resolution, also resolved to request two bodies within the Church (the Commission for Mission and the Centre for Theology and Ministry) to actively work for the inclusion of General Religious Education (GRE) in schools.

This resolution is the culmination of three years of investigation by a task group of the Church, examining a number of aspects of Christian education in schools, with particular focus on the governance, SRI program materials and instruction and communication by ACCESS ministries.

The Church was informed that under the new leadership of ACCESS ministries there had been indications of a willingness to engage more openly with the Uniting Church's concerns. The timeline in the Synod resolution provides for ACCESS ministries to formally demonstrate a positive response.

Donald McKay, encourager

ROBERT BRENNAN remembers a passionate leader of the confessing movement

I find myself with the daunting task of remembering Rev Donald McKay on behalf of EMU (the Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church) and Reforming Alliance. It is daunting both because it is difficult to adequately pay tribute to Don's contribution to the evangelical cause in few words and because as a latecomer to EMU I am sure that I will miss important details.

Don was actively involved in leading EMU from its inception in the 1990s through to being actively involved with the merger with Reforming Alliance into the ACC. Prior to all of these changes, he was actively involved in earlier groups promoting evangelism and the spreading of the gospel including the Fellowship for Revival.

We remember with gratitude Don's willingness to give himself to state and national evangelical leadership, tirelessly calling the church to its central purpose, to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Don challenged the church in its structures and its people to not be distracted from this



Don and Barbara McKay

task. Evangelicals remember his words of encouragement in newsletters and the days of encouragement held at Samford that helped many to face the uncertain future during the trying days around the 1997, 2000 and 2003 Assemblies. Typical of this encouragement are these words Don wrote at the end of '97 after yet more distressing news reached us concerning the fate of yet another leading evangelical minister in response to official hostility. It would have been so easy to give into despair in response to the ongoing lack of safety and respect that all evangelicals feel in the UCA. Don didn't. He wrote:

"This morning in my personal

reading, I read – *The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me; your love, O LORD endures forever – Do not abandon the works of your hands* (Ps 138:8). I took that to mean that despite our weaknesses, the Lord would still use us for His purposes, and I also pray that the Lord will not abandon the "work of His hands" in the Uniting Church in Australia."

Don took the watchman on the wall role to which we are called seriously. I have seen him take on the task of confronting the church and its leaders, asking why when it would have been much easier to remain silent and not rock the boat. He was rightly, I believe, convinced that such short-term peace is not worth the long-term trouble that comes from not facing the important questions.

I have stood with him before the Synod and faced the naked hostility that comes when we ask people to face what they would rather forget or dismiss. While many thought him harsh or hard, Don approached these situations with reluctant determination. When opposed and confronted as often happened afterward, he always responded with grace and understanding, ready to both listen and challenge the speaker.

This graciousness was a characteristic of his ongoing interactions with church leadership and anyone else for that matter. He would respond with grace in private to those who

Continued next page

Peter Blackburn remembers Don in Qld

Don was always very positive and active in declaring the gospel and in standing firm for the truth of the gospel record. When Don was a Methodist probationer stationed, I believe, at Mitchell, he had to be reviewed and examined by the annual Downs District Synod. Synod appointed me to conduct the oral examination. I was impressed then by Don's sincerity, his Biblical and theological soundness and his forthright stance on Biblical truth.

Much later (80s or 90s?), because I was Executive Secretary of the Na-

tional Fellowship for Revival (FFR) as well as giving what encouragement I could to FFR members scattered across Queensland, I approached Don about taking this second role. Don called a meeting which ended up forming a Queensland branch of EMU (Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church). While both FFR and EMU represented the same theological convictions, EMU was much more aggressive in speaking out about error in the UCA. Don, ably supported by Barbara, was ideally suited to the leadership role.

Very special education

In my life outside of ministry, I am a special education teacher. The school at which I work specifically caters for students with moderate to severe intellectual delays. Every Friday, I teach the same class - a group of senior students with high support needs. The other days, I visit different classes, relieving the teachers when needed. My work is often challenging and at times dangerous. But, it is also a source of joy. One of the greatest joys that comes from working in special education is what it has taught me about grace.

At the time of writing, multitudes of Year 12 students are sitting their final exams; the culmination of their entire school career and the gateway into the next stage of life. Particularly in the senior years, classes focus on preparing students for their futures, so that they will one day successfully contribute to society.

My students are not sitting these exams. They will probably never attend university or have a high-flying professional career. Some will eventually be engaged in employment; some will be able to achieve relative independence in life. Some may never learn to speak.

My commitment to teaching and caring for my students is not dependent on what they will one day offer society. Instead, I believe that they are worthy of care and respect simply because they are human beings created in God's image. I am called to show grace to my students, accepting them and loving them



Rich Johnson Central Florida Down Syndrome Association

for who they are (their challenging behaviours included). From this point of grace I work with each of them, meeting them where they are and helping them to grow to their full potential. I admit, it's not always easy when facing the full force of a meltdown or another round of defiant behaviour but by showing grace, I am free to rejoice in the beautiful and unique way that God has created them.

Reflecting on the nature of grace inevitably leads me to think of the grace God has shown me. God's grace is immeasurably greater than the grace I show to my students. My grace comes from knowing that my students are, like me, image bear-

ers of God; we are inherently equal no matter how our works may differ. However, when I stand before God, it is as a sinner standing before perfect holiness. Ephesians 2:1-3 reminds us that, although created in his image, we were dead in our transgressions, completely unable to please God and deserving of his wrath.

This is the point at which God chose to show his grace. From his grace, he works through the Holy Spirit to grow us into maturity and fullness, offering forgiveness when we fall. Knowing this, we are called to show grace to others in the hope that they might catch a glimpse of the one who has been gracious to us.

Bella Hibbard

From page 16

had misrepresented or strongly opposed him in public. He would work to attempt to solve the apparently unsolvable problems with those with whom he seemed to share no common ground.

Don was steel against steel. The public face that the church saw in his ministry was an extension of his ministry and leadership with us all. He would always challenge us to think about why we believed what

we believe, challenge us to go deeper into the Word and our thinking, all the while encouraging us in our faith and ministry. You never left a meeting with him without thinking more deeply about the faith or being deeply encouraged. We will all miss his counsel, directness and the way in which his ministry encouraged us to be more than we thought we could be in Christ.

We cherish his ability to be confronting, challenging and encour-

aging all at the same time. We give thanks that he lived a life infused with an overwhelming passion for our Lord Jesus Christ and proclaiming the wonder of the good news we have received in Him.

I am confident his Lord's response will be, "well done good and faithful servant".

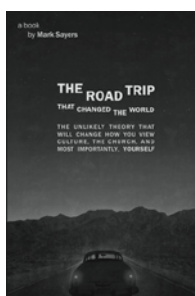
*Rev Dr Robert Brennan
Last Secretary of EMU Queensland
and Current secretary of ACC
Queensland Committee.*

Why we are all on a roadtrip

PAT NOLLER reviews a book that she finds “fascinating and scary”

THE ROAD TRIP THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

By Mark Sayers
(2012, Moody Press)



I purchased and read this book at the request of a 90-year-old friend who was reading it and wanted my opinion. I found it fascinating and scary at the same time.

Sayers, clearly a cultural commentator with an almost unnerving perception of what is going on in our world gives us some amazing insights into what has been happening over the last 50 or so years. He also discusses reasons why both the culture and the church are struggling at this time. As John Dickson, Director of the Centre for Public Christianity, has commented, this book is “a mesmerising blend of anecdote and literature, pop sensitivity and cultural analysis, earthiness and biblical reflection”.

The writer takes as his focus a novel *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac published in 1957. He claims to have written the book in three weeks. Kerouac’s book described by Sayers as “part confessional, part travelogue and part novel” apparently chronicles a road trip taken by a group of males in the USA between 1947 and 1951.

These men who criss-crossed America a number of times were seeking unfettered pleasure and total freedom from any kind of commitment. Speed, sex and drugs were all on the agenda. As the monument to Kerouac in Lowell, Massachusetts where he was born proclaims, “The Road is Life”.

Kerouac saw himself as seeking “a return to a deeper understanding of life in contrast to the shallowness

of contemporary living”. His impact, however, according to Sayers, has been quite the opposite. Sayers traces our current culture of individualism, obsession with freedom and commitment phobia to the influence of Kerouac and others like him.

In this analysis, the road is a metaphor for the kind of life where both the freedom to please oneself and a lack of commitment to anyone or anything seem to be high priorities for the current crop of young adults. According to Sayers, a whole generation was encouraged “to chase experience and self-absorption – in other words, they were clearly the “ME generation” eschewing the concept of covenant or commitment as too restricting.

As one young person who had actually read Kerouac’s book pointed out to me, most people in her generation would not have read it.

It seems, however, that the ethos has continued to permeate both the culture and the church for several

generations. Full commitment to one another is resisted in personal relationships, as well as in the church, and even in terms of commitment to Christ.

It is interesting to note that at the end of his life, Kerouac claims to see the Cross “as clear as anything I ever saw in my life”. It is not clear whether he cried out to Christ like the thief on the cross.

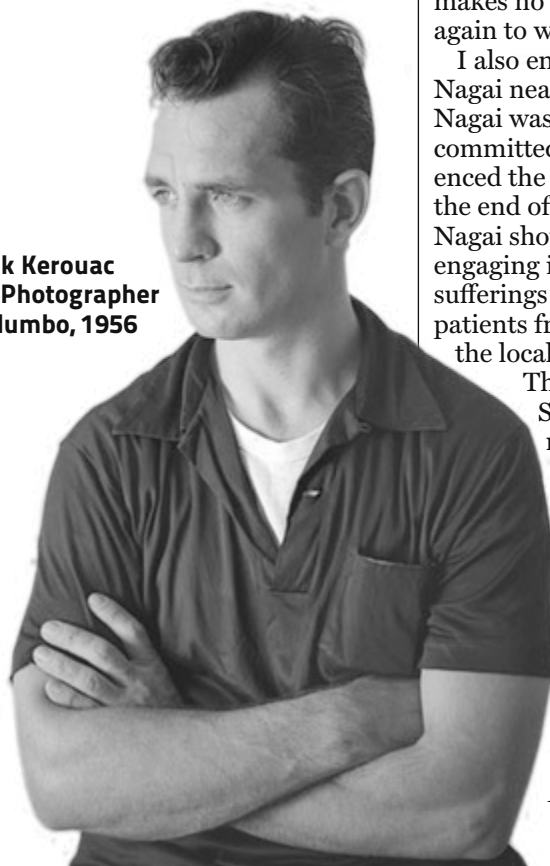
Sayers’ cultural commentary is beautifully written. It includes a thoughtful exposition of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden including what he sees as the devastating effects of Adam’s passivity.

He also analyses God’s call to Abraham, suggesting that he was the first countercultural rebel. Unlike Kerouac, Abraham’s life “offers us a road of faith, in contrast to our culture’s road of self”. He goes on to argue that Abraham when he parts ways with Lot is “again asked to break with his culture, with the world, to walk to a different beat, to obey a set of rules that seemingly makes no sense. He is being asked again to walk the path of faith”.

I also enjoyed the story of Takashi Nagai near the end of the book. Nagai was a Japanese scientist, a committed Christian who experienced the bombing of Nagasaki at the end of the Second World War. Nagai showed himself a true saint engaging in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings as he rescued bedridden patients from the inferno that was the local hospital.

The book then ends with Sayers preaching in a German Lutheran church in Manhattan where he discerns an openness and receptivity to the Word and “choices for community over individualism, for covenant over consumerism, for Christ over self”. There is hope!
*Emeritus Professor Pat Noller
(Convenor of the ACC Board of Communication)*

Jack Kerouac
by Photographer
Palumbo, 1956



THIS IS THE ACC

Who we are

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

Our goals include

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

What does ACC do to help you?

The ACC conducts meetings, events and seminars to assist believers to

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

What we want to do

The objects of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to join us

Please consider joining the ACC.

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

Membership rates for supporting members: Concession (single or couple): \$40.00 pa. (financial year basis) Full (single or couples): \$70.00 p.a

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

What happens next

- March 3-4, 2015: ACC National Council Sydney meeting
- July 12 - 18, 2015: Uniting Church 14th Assembly - Perth.
- September, 2015: ACC Annual Conference and Meeting - Adelaide

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

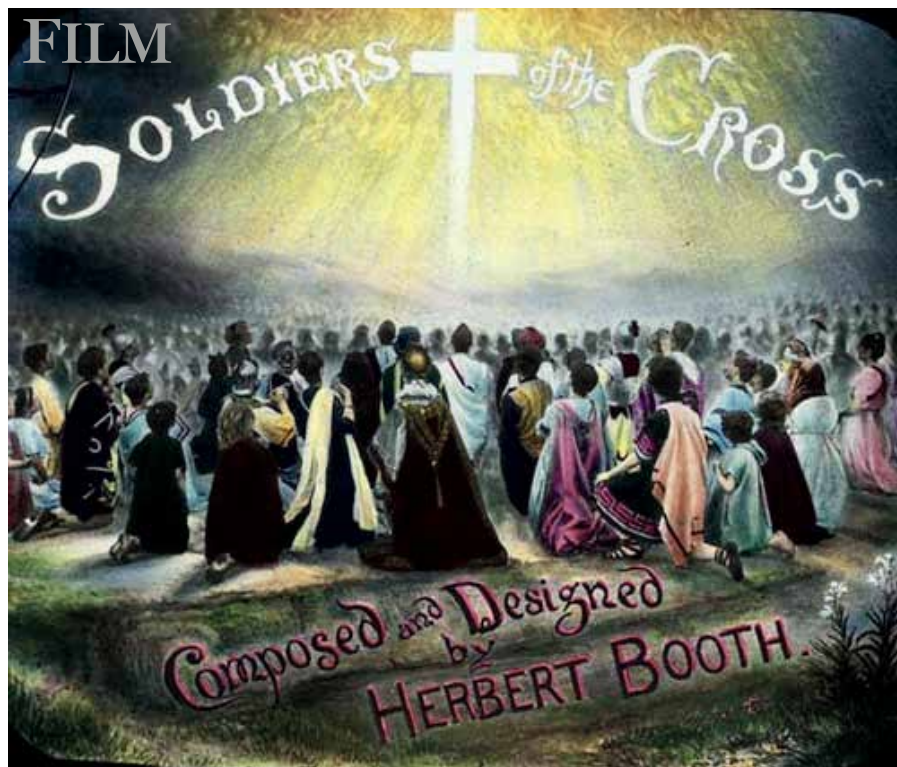
No. 2 The Hope of a New Heaven and New Earth: A Study Guide with DVD (2011) ISBN 978-0-9804493-6-5

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



Colourised poster for *Soldiers of the Cross*

Film ministry for a brave new world

In past end of year editions of *ACCatalyst* I have outlined some possible films for watching or use during the Christmas and New Year period. I decided to give a brief outline of the some of the thoughts behind this focus again to encourage some wider interaction with this medium.

Of course, the Christian church has long used different media other than the printed word to tell its story, notably the simple art of story-telling, a very effective and often visual presentation helpful for those who were illiterate.

Plays based on religion, usually arising from the Catholic mass, including the mystery plays and the Passion plays developed in medieval times, with the Oberammergau Passion Play first performed in 1634 and next to be undertaken in 2020.

It took a while before new technologies developed to enhance a 'technological' experience of the visual with the 'magic lantern projection' (like an early form of overhead projector for those under 30 years), emerging in the 17th century and continuing until the development of photography in the 19th century and then the relatively quick move to early forms of motion or moving pictures.

The 20th Century film witnessed the rapid expansion of the motion picture industry and Christians were vitally involved in the first twenty-five years, including for the groundbreaking Australian work within the Salvation Army, with Herbert Booth (son of the movement's founder), and Joseph Perry using film for the Army's mission.

The first major work produced in Australia was a combined film, lecture and slide show about Christian martyrs and heroes of the faith *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900).

In one sense this presentation was similar to what many people do with PowerPoint or similar computer-based programmes today.

The first period of film was termed the 'silent era'. There were thousands of productions and many notable silent films had religion as a central element, though interestingly, this was also the time when questions arose about the church's involvement, especially as secular films began to show some of the more immoral aspects of life.

For many in the church, film was beginning to be seen as the devil's work, and religious groups retreated for a period.

Once commercial film became more cost effective in the 1950s and especially the 1960s, Christian organisations explored again the medium, realising it could be very effective to promote their missionary endeavours or use for evangelism. One Australian example of evangelistic follow-up was *Shadow of the Boomerang* (1960), which was a follow-up film to the influential 1959 Billy Graham Crusade in Australia.

Over the last 50 years, Christian film has continued to develop, though the focus initially was on historical and biographical features, especially about Christian missionaries, or for example well-known church founders like Times Squares Church founder David Wilkerson, played by Pat Boone in *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1970).

During the 20th Century, only a small number of Christian companies produced major films due to cost and distribution difficulties, but the 21st Century has witnessed a full circle of change, with again individual churches and ministers producing and distributing films, because simply the technology is there to enable cheaper, and more quality productions and every church is now a possible screening venue.

An Australian group Heritage HM was founded ten years ago to produce and distribute inspiring films. I have reviewed many of these in *ACCatalyst*, and believe screening a film is a simple and effective evangelistic outreach in this visual age. Many churches have undertaken such events, and have reached people who would never come to a church service. A wide range of helpful resources to encourage people in this ministry are available from the Heritage HM website: Movies Change People: <http://www.movieschangepeople.com/>

Occasionally during my ACC visitations, I have presented a seminar that outlines more about these ideas and also goes over the history and development of Christian involvement in film.

I would be pleased to interact with people who are keen to explore this issue more.

Peter Bentley
(ACC National Director)