

# VIEWPOINT

Volume 6, Issue 3, Spring 2023

A magazine of the Canberra Region Presbytery of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Online at [canberra.uca.org.au](http://canberra.uca.org.au)



**Contents**

Indigenous Acknowledgement ..... 1

From the Editor ..... 2

Silence And Waiting - Miriam-Rose ..... 2

For Our Elders- reflecting during NAIDOC Week 2023 – John Squires ..... 5

Deep Incarnation - Robbie Tulip ..... 10

Against The Tide - Rev Ross Kingham ..... 14

The Theological Culture of the Uniting Church ..... 16

‘Assembly ACT 2: In response to God’s call’ – a reflection ..... 18

Ecumenical News..... 19

Christian Jewish Dialogue ..... 21

Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard on the work of hope ..... 23

**Indigenous Acknowledgement**

Canberra Region Presbytery acknowledges the people of the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, Ngarigo, Yuin, and Gundungurra peoples, custodians from time immemorial of the lands on which we worship, serve and witness.

### From the Editor

The Uniting Church calls for a Yes vote in the Voice Referendum on 14 October. Our Spring Issue of Viewpoint features an article by Rev Dr John Squires supporting the Voice to Parliament, presenting a Christian grounding for the moral obligation to deliver on recognition in the form requested by Indigenous people, as a significant step toward reconciliation. We also include more theological reflections and news. Viewpoint Magazine offers a forum for members of the Uniting Church to share reflections on our faith. Contributions are always welcome.

In Christ

Robbie Tulip

Canberra Region Presbytery Secretary and Viewpoint Editor

[Secretary@cruc.org.au](mailto:Secretary@cruc.org.au)

### Silence And Waiting - Miriam-Rose

Reprinted with permission from [www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri](http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri)

Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness - A reflection by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr



The word, concept and spiritual practice that is dadirri (da-did-ee) is from the Ngen'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia). NGANGIKURUNGKURR means 'Deep Water Sounds'. Ngangikurungkurr is the name of my tribe. The word can be broken up into three parts: Ngangi means word or sound, Kuri means water, and kurr means deep. So the name of my

people means 'the Deep Water Sounds' or 'Sounds of the Deep'.

This reflection is about tapping into that deep spring that is within us.

Many Australians understand that Aboriginal people have a special respect for Nature. The identity we have with the land is sacred and unique. Many people are beginning to understand this more. Also there are many Australians who appreciate that Aboriginal people have a very strong sense of community. All persons matter. All of us belong. And there are many more Australians now, who understand that we are a people who celebrate together.

What I want to talk about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called dadirri. It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.

Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call "contemplation". When I experience dadirri, I am made whole again. I can sit on the riverbank or walk through the

trees; even if someone close to me has passed away, I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words. A big part of dadirri is listening.



Through the years, we have listened to our stories. They are told and sung, over and over, as the seasons go by. Today we still gather around the campfires and together we hear the sacred stories.

As we grow older, we ourselves become the storytellers. We pass on to the young ones all they must know. The stories and

songs sink quietly into our minds and we hold them deep inside. In the ceremonies we celebrate the awareness of our lives as sacred.



The contemplative way of dadirri spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again...

In our Aboriginal way, we learnt to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn – not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and

listening, waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years...

There is no need to reflect too much and to do a lot of thinking. It is just being aware.

My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness. My people today, recognise and experience in this quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all. It is easy for me to experience God's presence. When I am out hunting, when I am in the bush, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong; these are the times when I can simply be in God's presence. My people have been so aware of Nature. It is natural that we will feel close to the Creator.

Dr Stanner, the anthropologist who did much of his work among the Daly River tribes, wrote this: "Aboriginal religion was probably one of the least material minded, and most life-minded of any of which we have knowledge"...

And now I would like to talk about the other part of dadirri which is the quiet stillness and the waiting.

Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course – like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth...

When twilight comes, we prepare for the night. At dawn we rise with the sun.

We watch the bush foods and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly.

We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings. The right people must be present. Everything must be done in the proper way. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting, because we want things to be done with care. Sometimes many hours will be spent on painting the body before an important ceremony.

We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for.

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear.

We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways.

We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us – to catch up – but waiting with us, as we find our pace in this world.

There is much pain and struggle as we wait. The Holy Father understood this patient struggle when he said to us:

“If you stay closely united, you are like a tree, standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree, you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn”.

My people are used to the struggle, and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves had to spend many years learning about the white man's ways. Some of the learning was forced; but in many cases people tried hard over a long time, to learn the new ways.

We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time to listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for – respect and understanding...

To be still brings peace – and it brings understanding. When we are really still in the bush, we concentrate. We are aware of the anthills and the turtles and the water lilies.

Our culture is different. We are asking our fellow Australians to take time to know us; to be still and to listen to us...

Life is very hard for many of my people. Good and bad things came with the years of contact – and with the years following. People often absorbed the bad things and not the good. It

was easier to do the bad things than to try a bit harder to achieve what we really hoped for...

There are deep springs within each of us. Within this deep spring, which is the very Spirit of God, is a sound. The sound of Deep calling to Deep. The sound is the word of God – Jesus.

Today, I am beginning to hear the Gospel at the very level of my identity. I am beginning to feel the great need we have of Jesus – to protect and strengthen our identity; and to make us whole and new again.

“The time for re-birth is now,” said the Holy Father to us. Jesus comes to fulfil, not to destroy.

If our culture is alive and strong and respected, it will grow. It will not die.

And our spirit will not die.

And I believe that the spirit of dadirri that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves, but in our whole nation.

© 1988 Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr. All Rights Reserved.

If you have benefitted from this reflection please consider making a donation to the Miriam Rose Foundation which is a not-for-profit organisation working to empower Indigenous youth through education, art, culture and opportunity in the Daly River region.



### [Dadirri Film](#)

~ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann

(Aboriginal activist, educator, artist and 2021 Senior Australian of the year)

### **For Our Elders- reflecting during NAIDOC Week 2023 – John Squires**

*A Sermon preached by the Rev. Dr John Squires at Tuggeranong UCA on 9 July 2023, NAIDOC WEEK* **Readings:** Deuteronomy 30:11–16 and Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30



*Note:* this blog post contains images of Indigenous people who have passed away.

Today, the second Sunday in July, is the Sunday which, each year, brings to a close **NAIDOC Week**. This is a week which has a focus on the First Peoples of this continent and its surrounding islands. It has been held for over 50 years, under the

auspices of the *National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee* (which forms the acronym *NAIDOC*).

**NAIDOC Week** itself continues on from *National Aborigines Day*, which was held from 1955 onwards; that day, in turn, was a development from the *Day of Mourning*, which first took place on Australia Day in 1938, when protestors marched through the streets of Sydney, followed by a congress attended by over a thousand people. After the congress, a deputation led by William Cooper presented Prime Minister Joseph Lyons with a proposed national policy for Aboriginal people. Needless to say, the Prime Minister received these representations, and then ignored them.

So *NAIDOC Week* continues a tradition, now 85 years old, of placing a focus on our Indigenous people. The theme for *NAIDOC Week* this year is **For Our Elders**; and that is a most relevant theme, given what has been taking place in our national life for some time now. We have been guided and led by a group of resilient, intelligent, and compassionate Elders from many First Nations communities; and this year, we stand at a very significant moment in that journey with those Elders.

Almost a decade ago, in 2015, the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the then Opposition Leader the Hon Bill Shorten worked together to establish a *Referendum Council*.

That Council worked to build on the work of bodies established by previous governments: the *Expert Panel*, in 2010, established by Julia Gillard; and then the *Joint Select Committee*,



established by Tony Abbott in 2012. (In true public servant style, of course, there had to be multiple committees, reports, proposals, and processes!!)

The *Referendum Council* reported in 2017, taking into account the political and legal responses to the earlier reports, as well as the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the general public.

What resulted from that report was a series of **First Nations Regional Dialogues**, which were Indigenous designed and led consultations right across the country. Indigenous members of the Council formed an *Indigenous Steering Group*. Together, in consultation



with Indigenous community stakeholders and with advice from constitutional experts, they designed the Indigenous consultation process called the First Nations Regional Dialogues.

The Regional Dialogue held in Ross River, QLD, in 2017

As a result, thirteen *Regional Dialogues* were held across the country—in capital cities, regional towns, and with remote communities such as Broome in WA, Ross River in Queensland, and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. In each case, local Elders were involved in the planning and running of the consultation.

Each *Regional Dialogue* then chose Elders to send to a nation-wide **Indigenous Constitutional Convention**, which was held at Uluru in May 2017. That is the convention



that, after three full days of discussion, produced the ***Statement from the Heart***. This *Statement* has been the result of a long, careful process of consultation and discussion, under indigenous leadership, with bi-partisan political support.

It is this *Statement* which is asking for two things from the Australian people: for recognition of the First

Peoples in the Australian Constitution, with a permanent Voice to Parliament, and for a *Makarrata Commission* to oversee the process of making treaties with Elders from the various First Nations of this continent. And that first request is what the referendum, to take place later this year [on 14 October], will be asking us to decide.

What I am talking about today, some will say is political. That is true, in the sense that it is about how we shape the life of our society—which is what politics is about. Governments make laws and oversee processes that ensure the way we live together in society is respectful and considerate of one another. That is the business of politics.

But what I am talking about is not partisan political, in the sense that there are people of all political parties who are supporting the YES case in a coming referendum. Whilst Labor and Green politicians, and many independent politicians, have spoken in support of a YES vote in the referendum, there are many people in the Liberal Party who are also supportive of a YES vote. Whilst the Federal leadership of the Liberal Party is indicating doubts about the proposal, most state Liberal parties are supportive, and a group called *Liberals for YES* are speaking out in support.



Indeed, in February this year, every First Minister in Australia—territory, state, and federal—agreed to support the Voice to Parliament. This was a highly significant bi-partisan step by a group of informed leaders who recognised the importance of taking this step.

Before that, in the middle of last year, a number of Australian religious leaders declared their

support of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, which includes the request for just such a Voice to Parliament. There are Anglicans, Catholics, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Sikh, Quakers, Baptists, and others who support this, along with the Uniting Church. Our national President, the Rev. Sharon Hollis, was one of the signatories of this document.

In May this year, representatives of the peak bodies of many sporting organisations joined together to advocate a YES vote in the voting referendum: the AFL, the NRL, Rugby Union, Cricket Australia, Baseball Australia, Deaf Sport Australia, Football Australia, Basketball,



Noonkanbah land rights protest in 1980

Taekwondo, Golf, and more. There were 20 sporting organisation in all which signed a common statement of support.

For people in the **Uniting Church**, voting YES in the proposed referendum is a clear way to express our long-held and enduring commitment to our covenant relationship with First Peoples. Voting in this way to support the referendum

would be one more step along a pathway

that has been clear for many decades, that the UCA stands in solidarity with First Peoples in Australia. In 1980, at Noonkanbah in Western Australia, Uniting Church members stood in solidarity with the traditional owners, the Yungngora people, against the mining of their land. (You can see the Rev. Robert Stringer in the bottom right of the photo—he is bald, with a beard.)

The **Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress** was established in 1985, and a *Covenant* between the UAICC and the UCA was formalised in 1994.

This *Covenant* recognises that working for reconciliation amongst people is central to the Gospel. In 2009, the Preamble to the *UCA Constitution* was revised to recognise the difficult history of relationships between the First Peoples and the later arrivals, as Second Peoples. Our present relationship is one which seeks to ensure that we commit to the destiny together which we share as Australians.

Many of the various ethnic and cultural groups in our society have also spoken in support of the proposal that will be put to us in the referendum, including a number of Indian and Chinese community organisations, along with Sri Lankan, Italian, Irish, Iranian, Greek, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Pacific Islander community groups – to name just a few.

Leaders of Australian Muslim communities have expressed their strong support of the YES vote in the coming referendum. Indigenous Australian peoples have a long relationship with Muslims, dating back centuries before British colonisation, as Yolngu and other Indigenous peoples in the north of Australia traded and engaged in cultural exchanges with Makassans from Indonesia.

Kate Carnell, the national convenor of *Liberals for YES*, has said that “An Indigenous voice would be a standing body aimed at practical outcomes, with its existence mandated by the

Australian people because they support recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as the original inhabitants of our continent. So it is fair, it is practical, it is workable and constitutionally safe.”

Many leaders in the Uniting Church have spoken in support of a YES vote. Supporting a vote for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament is yet another step along the pathway that the Uniting Church has been walking for over 40 years, of sharing a destiny together. It’s an expression of our central commitment to justice for First Peoples. It is an act that sits at the very heart of the Gospel.

So my advocacy, today, is for a YES vote in the referendum: not as a partisan political vote, but as an expression of the Gospel to which we are all committed. You would each have received the resource that the Assembly has prepared - <https://uniting.church/together-yes/> - explaining why the Uniting Church is advocating for a YES vote. That provides helpful commentary on this important decision.

Alongside that, let us consider the words from scripture that we have heard today. Moses tells the people that what God requires of us is not “too hard”; for “that word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe” (Deut 30:14).

Jesus tells us to “take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29). The word is near; the Voice calls to us. Today, the yoke that we are to take upon ourselves as a nation, is to ensure that First Peoples do have a Voice in our national life. That yoke, I am confident, will be constructive and productive.

The Anglican priest and hymn writer **Elizabeth Smith**, whose hymns we often sing (as we shall, to close this service today), has written a prayer about the forthcoming referendum. She has shared it online, offering it so that others could pray it too. So let us pray.

“God bless Linda Burney, Minister for Indigenous Australians, and all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders who are working towards a “Yes” vote in the coming Referendum.

Give them the words and the wisdom to make the case warmly. Give them perseverance in the face of hostility or indifference. Give them courage and resilience when they are met with casual, structural, or overt racism.

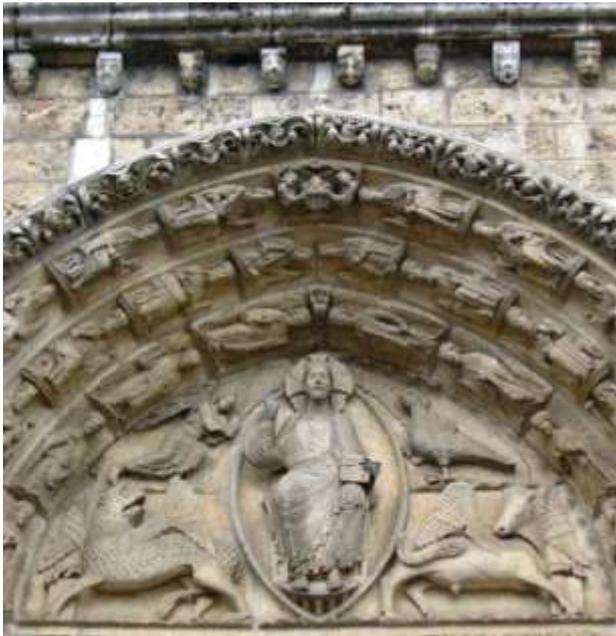
Give us the grace, in our own communities, to be the allies they need, by our listening, our learning, and our encouragement.

Confirm them in their vocation to lead all Australians towards a future where First Nations people are heard, seen, honoured and treasured across this land.

We pray through the Spirit who calls us to new ways of living together with justice and truth. *Amen.*”



## Deep Incarnation - Robbie Tulip



Christ in Majesty among the Four Living Creatures, Chartres Cathedral, France

“The Sovereign Lord says to these dry bones I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life.” Ezekiel 37:5

The integration of ecology and theology is an essential feature of modern spiritual ethics, in recognition that systematic observation of the natural world provides the context for well-grounded thinking about religion. As we reflect on how concern for nature is central to the future of humanity, we can see that the wisdom of Indigenous spirituality based on connection to country offers a starting point for conversation about Biblical ideas that call us to revere the natural world as sacred. Celebrating the sanctity of nature aligns to what Pope Francis described in his

encyclical *Laudato Si* as a ‘sublime communion of creation’.

The Australian Catholic theologian Father Denis Edwards provided a profound study of ecological theology in his book *Deep Incarnation*, published in 2019 by Orbis Books. His main theme is God’s redemptive suffering with creatures, how the presence of God’s love is the source of salvation. These are complex ideas that require work to define and interpret. The meaning of salvation deserves to be the subject of much more conversation as we ponder what to do about the ecological and climate crisis facing our world. Incarnation is the Christian belief that the eternal God who created and sustains our universe was fully present in the life of Jesus Christ. The presence of God in Jesus provides a unique point of connection between the eternal truth and grace of God and the fallen world of humanity.

The world is connected to God through the incarnation of Christ, manifesting the presence of eternity within time. Our connection to God can save the world from its path to destruction and enable us to find a path toward healing and flourishing through commitment to durable ecological and human values. Indeed, the general principle of connection is central to religion. The words religion and ligament come from the same root meaning of connection. Healthy religion serves to connect a society together just as our ligaments connect our bones within our body, and just as everything in a healthy ecosystem is connected through complex stable interrelationships, creating a state of grace.

A problem that Denis Edwards observed in traditional theology was that it often neglects the importance of connection between humanity and nature. Instead, much conventional belief wrongly separates humanity from nature, mistakenly interpreting salvation in terms of personal afterlife rather than seeking an integrated natural vision of what it could mean for God to save the world. The tradition over the period of Christendom developed a theology that was more attuned to imperial stability than to the messianic cultural transformation needed to create the kingdom of God on Earth. The imperial tradition

stands in some tension to the hope of Jesus expressed in The Lord's Prayer that the will of God may be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Edwards writes that we can no longer think of ourselves as individuals whose reality ends with our skins. Rather, we must find our salvation through the interconnected world of all matter and energy and information, together in relationship to each other and to the cosmos, just as the incarnate Christ is related to the cosmos at large through his oneness with God the Father. This priority of universal connection to nature reflects the teaching of Jesus at John 3:17, that he had come to save the world, not to condemn it. The ethical meaning of this teaching is deepened when we understand salvation as referring primarily to the world in its whole complex natural planetary reality.

Reading the Bible with a more critical and scholarly eye shows us that Christ understood salvation to mean planetary transformation. For example, in rejecting the wide and easy path to destruction (Matthew 7:13), Christ interprets hell as everything destructive and harmful. Hell is where our instinctive laziness and indifference allow collapse of complex systems rather than their renewal. Together we can develop a more integrated ecological vision of the incarnation of Christ to shift our community away from inadequate interpretations. An ecological understanding can help us to see how the glorious grace of God is working to liberate the whole natural creation of Earth from what Saint Paul referred to as bondage to decay (Romans 8:21), another image of hell.

God is present as much in the changes of history as in the stable and durable transcendent ethical values of traditional theology. Where conventional theology often taught that God could not change, the theology of deep incarnation suggests that God's identity in the person of Christ was constantly changing, as God fully chose to experience all the changing feelings of life in all their complex nature. God's intent, emerging through the primary divine attribute of love, is that humanity should freely flourish for ever on Earth. Seeing that God is intimately entwined with our constantly changing world, we can begin to see the presence of unchanging eternal truth in all the processes of natural evolution.

In *Deep Incarnation*, Dennis Edwards extends the traditional understanding of faith by focusing on God's loving presence in the whole of creation. God experiences suffering and change through radical solidarity and love for the whole world, integrating love for humanity with love for nature. God differs from us in being eternal while we are bound within time, infinite where we are finite, all-powerful where we are weak, and purely good while our human motives mix good with evil. Jesus Christ, as the fully conscious presence of God within the finite bounds of time and space, connects us to the infinite and eternal. Jesus brings the unconditional eternal love of God to confront the evil of the world through his sublime moral teachings, leading to his sacrificial death on the cross and the transforming power of his resurrection as an embracing promise of healing and fulfilment.

Saint John's Gospel tells us that the meaning of the incarnation is that the divine Word of God became mortal human flesh. Denis Edwards explores the ecological meaning of this teaching, observing that the incarnation is a cosmic event, that God is limited to working with creaturely reality, and that God suffers together in solidarity with all nature as an expression of divine love. God takes the side of the victims and feels their pain. An ecological interpretation of the incarnate Word can see divine reason in the elegant causality and consistency of natural evolution. The incarnation signifies the work of God

toward a peaceful and holy creation, calling all humanity to cooperate with God in enabling the natural world to flourish through the reconciliation of all things.

Therefore, the theology of *Deep Incarnation* sees reality in evolving relational terms. Our interconnected web of life is an ecological system where everything is connected and related to everything else. Christ enables all creation to find unity and wholeness in relation to God, with the divine Word of God supporting the complex interweaving of matter and spirit. The risen Christ is the ecological centre of creation, with the Word incarnate revealed in and constituted by ecological and cosmic interconnections. The profound teaching of Saint Paul that in Christ all things hold together (Colossians 1:17) means the incarnation enables the coherent unity of all creation in connection to humanity.

The incarnation reflects the humble Wisdom of God in the world, recognising that in Christ God became as nothing in order that he might be everything (Philippians 2:5-11). Indigenous people and all who have been despised and rejected by the kingdoms of the world can relate to this redeeming idea that God became nothing. Christ came into the world to represent people who have been disregarded as though they were nothing, people who have been ignored and oppressed by imperial power. Christ expresses the essential moral principle of the sacred dignity of the meek, finding the liberating path of salvation in the recognition of divinity within and among the least of the world.

The theology of *Deep Incarnation* draws on the ideas of the early church to observe that the Word of God provides leadership and order to govern the world. However, the insatiable murder and violence that fills the Earth shows humanity has turned away from the order of grace. Our fall from grace creates an essential need to find the point of connection that Christ provides to the enduring truths of the love and goodness and care of God. As St Athanasius of Alexandria wrote, the incarnation of Christ enables us to lift our eyes to the immensity of heaven, and discerning the harmony of creation, to know its ruler, the Word of God.

This sense of the Word of God as providing the stable harmony of the visible heavens, governing the mathematical elegance and beauty of the laws of physics, presents an essential clue for us to reconcile theology and science. The theology of deep incarnation calls us to recognise the mathematical order observed in astronomy as revealing the rational grace of God. Divine grace and glory are discerned as we connect the rational evidence of science with the logic of faith in an integral truth.

This same gracious mathematical order seen in the grandeur of the cosmos ultimately rules the more chaotic ecological order of our planet through the unity of all things, obeying the scientific principle 'on earth as in heaven'. Our planet Earth is part of the cosmos, but too often we ignore the sensitivity and fragility of our planet. By neglecting the natural order of life, we fail to see ecology as the gracious gift of God. The risks created by this ignorance of natural order are expressed at Revelation 11:18, where Christ says the wrath of God is against those who destroy the Earth.

The place of humanity within cosmic order can best be understood through the incarnation of Christ. Understanding Christ as the rational mediating connection between the seeming disorder of the world and the eternal order seen in the heavens shows the pathway of redemption toward a planetary return to a state of grace. By fully representing God in human form, Christ offers the model of authentic human existence.

Heaven is not just a comforting emotional fantasy, but rather a vision of the planetary transformation of the earth, our permanent home. The Word of God teaches us to overcome the pervasive problem that we have been led astray by our desires and instead to find the deep reason within the story of grace, from Jesus Christ as the one who governs and orders the creation through wisdom.

Denis Edwards contends that a key message of holy wisdom is that the human community is responsible for the wellbeing of all life on Earth, but our worship of false Gods has blinded us to this essential truth. Salvation therefore involves a new kind of relationship of unity between humanity and God and nature, seen in God's loving solidarity with suffering as opening the path to the transforming and liberating sanctification of our world, entwined in human nature, revealed in the cross of Christ. Our intimate integrating connection to God arises from recognition that God shares in all good values that support the ongoing flourishing of our complex planetary wellbeing, and opposes all evil values that promote needless destruction and suffering.

The theology of the cross presents the profundity of deep incarnation, firstly with the observation that in his death on the cross, Christ revealed and confronted the radical power of evil in the world, and triumphed over evil by rising from the dead. The theologian Karl Rahner saw the death of Christ in ecological terms, as an entry into the heart of the Earth, where everything is interconnected. Rather than the old story of the descent of Christ to Hell, Edwards invites us to see Easter Saturday as a time when Earth is infused with divine life, with the resurrection as an embrace of the Earth. Through the cross we are called to love the Earth as our mother, through the loving self-identification of the crucified Christ with creation. When Edwards says the cross is imprinted by the Word on the whole of reality, he means God's incarnate presence in Christ serves to reveal the sanctity of all nature.

The evolutionary framework of ecological spirituality calls us to see life on earth as oriented to an ever-increasing complexity toward spirit, with the incarnation of God in Christ revealing above all that the whole of creation is one. This presentation of natural complexity as beloved by God further suggests that ecological theology has an essential role in advocating for the sanctity of biodiversity. We can see divine complexity in the ever-deepening ecological interactions of environmental systems, and can therefore see the destruction of complex natural systems as evil. The Bible endorses this view by saying the wrath of God is against those who destroy the Earth (Rev 11:18). We can justly see this moral vision in the injunction of Christ in the Last Judgement (Matt 25:40) that whatever we do to the most vulnerable things in nature we do to Jesus Christ.

In Christ, humanity can transcend our instinctive unreflective bodily situation to understand our unity with God, overcoming our tribal instincts to evolve toward a higher spiritual unity. Through Christ, the world as a whole is illumined by God, through commitment to the planetary community of life, revealing Christ as the innermost secret of all the world. God is not impassive, unfeeling or distant. God is kind and loving and just and good, entirely present in our world for our salvation through the incarnate earthly life of Christ.

*Revised from a presentation to an eco-theology workshop held by the Caring For Creation community on 21 January 2023 at Desert Creek House, Numbugga.*

## Against The Tide - Rev Ross Kingham

Readings - Matthew 16:13-20, Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

**We are called by the gospel to know where we are going.**

**Sometimes, you do have to take a stand.**

...even when you are unsure about your ability to do so.

History is crammed with stories, both within the church, and beyond it, of people who are so committed to *life*, that they raise a contrary voice when all around is darkness.

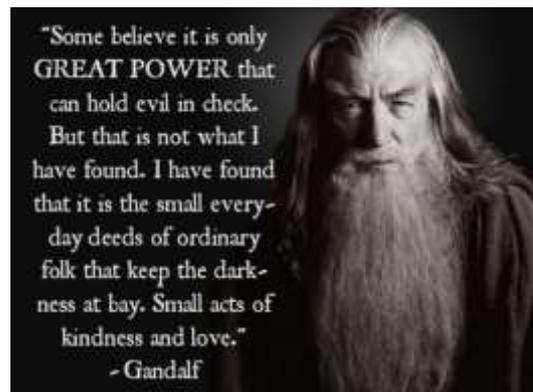
Some of them prevail; some of them do not prevail. The things that is of supreme importance is that they made their stand.

Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly's song (1991)

*From little things big things grow  
From little things big things grow  
From little things big things grow  
From little things big things grow*

We encourage dreaming. We hesitate to warn  
that most dreams eventually crumble.

No, of course not. That would be cruel to a child.



I encourage dreaming. Not all dreams come to pass, but a life devoid of dreams seems empty. Dreams enable the novice to try hard. Dreams build nations. Dreams launch relationships. The stifling of dreams is unfair.

Long ago, Jesus affirmed the dreaming of a novice who had glimpsed deeper truth. Jesus renamed him "Rock" and said he would be the foundation of something called "ecclesia."

*Matthew 16:13* When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." <sup>20</sup> Then He admonished the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ.

Jesus went on to chastise Peter for his obtuseness and called him a "stumbling block."

<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" <sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

For Simon was a weak man who had much to learn....the very picture of each of us!

We don't know what Jesus meant by "ecclesia" (usually translated as church). He hardly ever used the word - only three times in Matthew, not once in Mark, Luke and John. The word was important to the apostle Paul, because he was founding small circles of believers, and he used the term "ecclesia" (meaning, "those called out") to describe those regional communities.

It is inconceivable that Jesus meant what later emerged bearing the name "ecclesia," or "church" - an institution with rules, hierarchies of power, official doctrines, buildings, thrones, armies, vaults of gold, and, for a period longer than the Caesars themselves, the dream of world domination. Jesus gave his life to draw people away from such worldly appetites.

No, Jesus was affirming a dreamer.

Peter had seen something. Perhaps because he himself had briefly walked on water, perhaps because he had seen deeply into Jesus as he ministered, Simon had looked beyond the immediate and seen the things of God.

He had seen the holiness of Jesus. He had grasped this moment as something more than a charismatic rabbi teaching a few friends.

.....Jesus exclaimed that Peter' insight was given him by God the Father.

It is unlikely that Peter had seen much. His behaviour continued to be obtuse. Peter had looked beyond the obvious and dreamed of more.

At its best, "ecclesia" is a community of dreamers: men and women who have been "called out" of the world by eyes that see more, by hearts that yearn for more, by minds that imagine more, by souls that feel, however briefly, the warm breath of their maker.

This is our calling today. Hearts that yearn for more....

### **Miriam – 'Rebellion'**

Miriam was a prophetess, an Israelite living in ancient Egypt. She was the older sister of Moses and Aaron. [She first appears in the Book of Exodus, where she helped save her baby brother Moses from Pharaoh's decree to drown all Hebrew boys.](#)

Moses was saved from death by Pharaoh's hand by being hidden in a basket of pitch-caulked reeds amid bulrushes, watched over by his sister, Miriam.

Picture the riverbank, see the colours of sky, reeds, water. Smell. Touch the grass. Slish, barefooted, in the shallow water. How old is Miriam? What is she thinking? How does she react as Pharaoh's daughter, the princess, with her maidservants, approach? What does Miriam do?

Even though it can be uncomfortable, vulnerability is also the birthplace for joy, creativity, authenticity, and love. With vulnerability, we can let our guards down and be seen for who we truly are. The truth about vulnerability is that is not a weakness; it is a strength.

Have you experienced vulnerability and in that experience been prepared for the day when you would stand with others in their vulnerability, and been instrumental in their strengthening?

**Peter, Miriam.....two of thousands of women and men who have stood against the tide, and do so today. Not because of their skill and insight, but because of the whisper of the Spirit which made them bold.**

## The Theological Culture of the Uniting Church

Robbie Tulip

**Act2 is a major transformational change project focussed on discerning and deciding on the future of the Uniting Church in Australia. It's taking place across our whole Church, and needs your voice.** In March 2020, the Assembly Standing Committee recognised that the Uniting Church is living through a time of massive change, opportunity and challenge. Hearing the call of the Basis of Union to always consider our life afresh, and as a Church that continually seeks the leading of the Spirit, the Act2 Project was born.

Led by the Assembly, Act2 is an invitation to every Uniting Church member, council and community to discern together where God is calling us into the future. We are looking at our life and asking: what do we need to do, and what do we need to change, to fully live out our shared identity, unity and commitment to God's mission?

As part of its work, the Act2 Project is seeking to reflect on the theological culture of the Uniting Church in Australia, and therefore invites contributions from theologians and others across the breadth of the Uniting Church. This could be in any form or genre including papers, provocations or reflections. Contributions can be sent to <https://www.act2uca.com/theologicalculture> until 30 September.

At time of publication, the page had received the following contributions.

- Rev Nicole Fleming 30/8/23: ['Why \(not\) rush Phase 2 Formation?' - a reflection/provocation for Act2](#)
- Rev Dr Chris Walker 30/8/23: [Reflection on the Theological Culture of the Uniting Church in Australia](#)
- Rev Dr Michelle Cook 23/8/23: [A reflection on our culture of discipling...](#)
- Anne Muirhead 23/8/23: [A Personal Reflection on Our Theological Culture](#)
- Rev Assoc Prof Geoff Thompson 16/8/23: [The Theological Culture of the Uniting Church in Australia: Reflections and Possibilities](#)
- Andrew Johnson 3/8/23: [Unpacking our theological culture](#)

ACT 2 defines the theological culture of the Uniting Church as *“that network of practices, institutions and texts which resource, sustain and extend the Uniting Church's particular*

*conversations, doctrinal decisions and prophetic speech about God, Christ and the world.”*  
The discussion invites us to reflect on this definition and propose your own definition.

Here is my response to the questions asked.

### **What is the theological culture of the Uniting Church in Australia?**

The Uniting Church is a wonderful institution, with rich community networks that are profoundly informed by the saving wisdom of Jesus Christ expressed in the Gospels. The theological culture of the Uniting Church supports gospel values of truth, love and justice that are often neglected in our broader society and also in more conventional churches. These values make the Uniting Church a voice of conscience in Australian public life, standing up for the common good against harmful sectional interests and degraded values. Theological interests range from how worship and pastoral support can provide emotional comfort and healing and identity across to a more messianic and critical view of theology as calling for cultural transformation. The transformative vision grounded in the theology of our founding churches is expressed in the Basis of Union, “in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church”. Loyalty to Christ calls us to build an ethical focus on justice and the sacrifice of worldly pleasures in order to hear the call of God.

While the theological culture of the Uniting Church is broadly informed by critical scholarship to a greater extent than most churches, many in the church also have an uncritical acceptance of traditional literal Bible stories and beliefs. Holding tradition and criticism in dialogue and tension, to encourage respect for diversity, is an important part of the life of the church. The preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church is a landmark theological statement of identity and equity through its recognition of the dignity and value of Indigenous cultural traditions, and its challenging call for honesty about history.

### **What is the theological culture to which we should aspire as the Uniting Church?**

The theological culture should aspire to build up the Uniting Church on a basis of integrity, based on strong Biblical scholarship. Cultivating a shared vision that integrates tradition with modern scientific knowledge is a difficult but necessary objective. Theology should engage the broader society and the church in dialogue about ethical concerns, imagining what sort of world we want to encourage. The conventional theology of Christendom had an imperial context, with doctrines emphasising political stability and unity with church subordinated to and allied to the state. By contrast, the emerging theology that we should aspire to is more messianic, bringing a liberatory vision of a transformed world in Christ.

### **What is distinctive about the theological culture of the Uniting Church?**

The heritage of faith from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational traditions creates a unique and distinct culture in the Uniting Church, recognising the importance of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, open to modern scholarship, and importantly shaped by the encounter between British Christianity and Australia’s Indigenous people. The effort to understand and overcome the racist exclusion and suppression of Indigenous people in colonial culture has brought some humility and repentance into our theological culture, reflected in the strong support for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

### **What are the practices, institutions and texts which have been most significant in shaping the Uniting Church’s theological culture?**

Reading the Bible in the context of worship and reflection is the single most significant factor. Attending weekly worship services with the powerful regular ritual practice of communion, singing hymns that express our theological commitments, listening to the preaching of the Word of God and participating in the broader life of the church all create community identity in the Uniting Church and provide the foundation of shared values and beliefs of theological culture.

**To what extent is there continuity and discontinuity within our Church of the traditions of those churches that came into Union?**

Strong continuity exists in the recognition of the centrality of Jesus Christ as the guide for moral formation. An area of discontinuity is in the gradual shift from an imperial to a messianic vision of Christian identity. As theology has come to emphasise social change over personal salvation, and has increasingly read the Bible in allegorical rather than literal ways, Uniting Church perspectives have also moved from a validation of the wider society to a more critical perspective.

**What are the practices, institutions and texts we will need into the future to resource, sustain and extend the theological culture to which we aspire?**

Christianity has a vital central message for humanity about how our flawed and limited perspectives can connect to the eternal truths of God. A focus on the Gospel story can enable respectful listening and dialogue with other traditions, working together to find the shared truths needed for reconciliation.

**Assembly ACT 2: In response to God's call – a reflection**

Carolyn McAllister, Member, O'Connor Congregation

Section 6 of Assembly's Report is named 'Options for Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing' and begins with the following quotation from the UCA Basis of Union, Paragraph 13:

*"...will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission."*

This quotation is taken from the end of Paragraph 13 which follows on from the paragraph on Membership in the UCA Basis. This helps me begin to understand the context.

Functionally, I understand that membership is to do with a deeper sense of belonging – a two-way relationship between the church as a whole and an individual member of the church. In paragraphs 13 and 14(a), the Basis of Union describes what we can expect in regard to this relationship. I cannot see any room for compromise.

**13. Gifts and Ministries**

"The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant.

It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.

The Uniting Church, at the time of union, will recognise and accept the ministries of those who have been called to any task or responsibility in the uniting Churches.

The Uniting Church will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission."

Paragraph 14 (a) is a strong statement about the significance of the ministry of the Word in equipping all members "for their particular ministries":

**14(a)** "... Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, it is assured that God, who has never failed to provide witness to that Word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word. These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church. Such members will be called Ministers and their setting apart will be known as Ordination."

There's no indication in these paragraphs that the Minister should be expected to do everything in the congregation, nor is there any suggestion of a lay-led congregation without a Minister of the Word. Where either of these is happening then from what I read in the Assembly report, it seems there is a tendency for burnout.

With a shortage of Ministers of the Word, is there a renewed need for a revelation of God's mission of grace to the church, described in paragraphs 13-14(a) of the Basis in terms that are relational, pastoral, focussed on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and releasing each and every member into ministry? Is the outcome of this mission a special love for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as that ministry, in a multitude of ways, begins to fill homes, congregations, workplaces etc – wherever each member is called to be?

I am grateful for the Assembly's report and for the openness and opportunity to share these thoughts in *Viewpoint*.

### **Ecumenical News**

#### **Robbie Tulip**

My activity as Presbytery Secretary includes focus on ecumenical and inter faith relations. I attend the bi-monthly meetings of the ACT Churches Council on behalf of Presbytery. Recent topics of discussion at the Council have included the Voice to Parliament, discussion with Anglican Bishop Mark Short on Christian outreach in a multifaith context, and Christian Education in Schools.

The August meeting of the Council agreed this statement on the Voice Referendum:

That the ACT Churches' Council, in a spirit of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and in recognition of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, invites its member church congregations and parishes to prayerfully consider the issues concerning the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the national referendum expected to be held later this year.

In that regard the Council:

- (i) takes note of the expressions of support for the Voice by many Australian national and state church authorities and church-associated organisations;
- (ii) expresses its concern that, with a very few exceptions, efforts to date to close the gap between the economic, physical, educational and health-related situations of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians have failed to meet agreed targets;
- (iii) notes that a recent Productivity Commission analysis of this failure suggests strongly that more effective “listening” to indigenous voices and taking their views and suggestions into account could have made – and in future would be likely to make – a positive difference.

Moved Dr Kevin Bray (Church of Christ), Seconded Dr John Goss (Uniting Church)

Dr Bray also arranged a meeting of the ACT Churches Council with the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network, which I attended. They asked us to view the film [The Stones Cry Out](#).

My work with the Australian Student Christian Movement has focused on support for student Christians in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Indonesia, Timor Leste and the Philippines through the ecumenical linkages of the World Student Christian Federation, including support for the WSCF Asia Pacific Regional Committee Meeting held in Jakarta in July. I am helping ASCM to find university students willing to serve as staff.

The ANU Chaplaincy which I manage has a multi faith approach. The university is now finalising plans for a new multi faith chaplaincy centre. The Annual Lecture for the Chaplaincy in May was an interfaith panel with Christian, Jewish, Muslim and non-Abrahamic perspectives. The Chaplaincy Association has been renamed ANU Multi Faith Chaplaincy.

Dr John Williams, former Presbytery Chair, spoke to the recent ACT Churches Council meeting on activities for the [Season of Creation](#) over September, notably the work of the

Catholic group Care for Creation on ecological spirituality. As explained in this notice, Care for Creation are holding a weekly series of online discussions every Thursday in the Season of Creation from 31 August to 5 October ([link](#)).

Across the country, creation is crying out and communities are responding to these cries.

The Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn in collaboration with Australian Catholic University (ACU) is offering a series of six online dialogue sessions: **Integral ecology pilgrimage – Let Justice and Peace Flow**

This will be a dynamic, interactive and deep learning experience giving life to the global Laudato Si' goals – grounded on country, in eco-theology, and in Sacred Scripture.

God's creation and incarnation in Jesus Christ are part of an integrated action of God's loving, self-revelation and self-giving.

The experience of contemplation and dialogue will animate new pathways for the Laudato Si' action plan 2023-35 in the Archdiocese.

This series is a vital step on our Care for Our Common Home journey together, as part of the Year of the Holy Spirit.

Each year on 1<sup>st</sup> Sep Christians join in an ecumenical 'Season of Creation' culminating in the feast of St Francis of Assisi on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct.



**SEASON OF CREATION**  
PRAY AND TAKE ACTION FOR OUR COMMON HOME

**When? & Where?**

On Zoom - 6.30-8.30pm Thursday evenings –  
 31-Aug-23 – Cry of the earth, Cry of the poor  
 7-Sep-23 – Ecological spirituality  
 14-Sep-23 – Ecological economics  
 21-Sep-23 – Ecological education  
 28-Sep-23 – Adoption of simple lifestyles  
 5-Oct-23 – Community resilience & empowerment

(Convened by ACU's Jacqui Remond and Dr Megan Senegues.)

**Who?**

This invitation is for **all people of good will and of all ages** in parishes across the Archdiocese and in school communities (teachers, college students, parents, leaders and board members).

We encourage diverse participation including:

- pastoral and evangelisation leaders taking the next growth step.
- ecumenical and interfaith friends.
- those wanting to find out more about Pope Francis' Laudato Si' teachings.

Please share this invitation with people in your community. Communities and organisations are encouraged to nominate at least two or more people to register for group participation.

**(How?) To register**

Please note that you are invited to register for the whole program (all six sessions) at <http://bit.ly/2kT6t6y> or at



(After registering and closer to the first gathering you will receive a Zoom link.)

Participation in this pilgrimage will be recognized by ministries and agencies of the Archdiocese as a contribution to the requirement for professional development.

More information [www.care4creation.org.au](http://www.care4creation.org.au) or email [LaudatoSiACT@gmail.com](mailto:LaudatoSiACT@gmail.com)

**Integral ecology pilgrimage - Let justice and peace flow**

ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



POPE FRANCIS



Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn  
Created with Canva.com  
2023-2025



In collaboration with



Australian Catholic University

The [Wellspring Community](#) is organising a visit to Canberra by Rev Ruth Harvey, leader of the Iona Community in Scotland, and Aboriginal Christian leader Brooke Prentis, on the theme *Care For Creation: Listening to First Nations and Celtic Voices*. This is part of a national listening pilgrimage. During the Canberra visit Brooke Prentis will deliver a public lecture at ANU on The State of the Nation after the Referendum, at 7pm on Thursday 19 October, and a dialogue on Indigenous and Celtic Spirituality will be held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture starting at 1.30pm on Friday 20 October. Help with arranging and publicising these events would be welcome.



On some personal interests in ecumenical theology, I gave a [public lecture](#) to Canberra Jung Society reflecting on theological themes of holistic psychology, gave a [talk on climate policy](#) to the Presbytery Social Justice Group, and [preached](#) at Kippax Uniting Church on prophecy. I will give a talk at the [14<sup>th</sup> International Bonhoeffer Conference](#) in Sydney in January on Bonhoeffer, existence and climate.

### Christian Jewish Dialogue

Robbie Tulip

Three meetings on Christian Jewish Dialogue with the Canberra Jewish Community have following up from the recent decision to reconvene the ACT Council of Christians and Jews.

The ACT Jewish Community welcomed Christian representatives to a meeting at the National Jewish Memorial Centre on Sunday 25 June to reconvene the ACT Council of Christians and Jews. About ten people from the Jewish Community attended, with Catholic Archbishop Christopher Prowse, Anglican Bishop Mark Short, and Uniting Church Presbytery Secretary Robbie Tulip from the invited Christian denominations.

Dr Brian Wimborne opened the meeting by welcoming attendees. He described a hub and spoke model for religion, suggesting that at the rim of the wheel the spokes are quite different and separate, while at the hub they are integrated together, reflecting how the different religions have an underlying unity. The [International Council of Christians and Jews](#) sets out principles for cooperation in its [Mission Statement](#). Dialogue and mutual learning can reflect the teaching of Christ in John 14:2 "In my father's house are many mansions."

From 1990 the Canberra Branch of the Australian Council of Christians and Jews had active regular meetings and events and a wide contact list. Wesley Uniting Church in Forrest had an active role, including through Margaret Piper. Vernon Bailey led work on the hospice interfaith peace garden. A [2008 ECAJ report](#) states in its ACT Report:

Pam and George Rothman continue to run the Christian-Jewish Dialogue with Margaret Piper. Meetings have been held regularly in both the Wesley Uniting Church and our Centre with both Christian and Jewish speakers. Pam also represents our Community on multi-cultural matters. Bill Arnold and myself [Anita Shroot] have attended numerous other inter-faith gatherings and I have attended spasmodically the inter-faith forum of the ACT who are developing an inter-faith garden adjacent to Clare Holland House (Hospice). Alma Armstrong, leader of this group, attended with myself Abrahamic faith women's conference in Victoria in February. Sylvia Deutsch represented the Community recently at an Eid celebration run by the Department of Multicultural Affairs. Local clergy attended the Siyyum Torah.

The Jewish community are sensitive about conversion, with a number of Christian groups continuing to push this. There is concern our society is getting worse at dealing with difference, and we need to work on ways to bring communities together, opposing the rise of anti-Semitism and misconceptions in the broader society.

Archbishop Prowse commented that Christians need good friendships with Jews, with no proselytism, building on Vatican dialogue. He would like to encourage youth gathering, and work in academic, liturgical and social spheres. Bishop Short commented on the importance of shared discussion of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The low profile of the Jewish Community means they have fewer contacts. They would like to change this by planning a program of activities. The meeting agreed to reconvene the ACT Council of Christians and Jews, and to plan an event at the Jewish Centre on 20 August. A working group was appointed to discuss this event. The heads of churches and Jewish Community representatives propose to meet about every six months.

The ACT Jewish Community extended an invitation to Christians to engage in dialogue on the Hebrew Scriptures, beginning with a talk from Frank Selch on Sunday 20 August on Prophets of the Tanakh. In this fascinating discussion, Frank observed that as we reason together, we can communicate to avert conflict. Here is a summary of his remarks.

The Tanakh is largely equivalent to the Christian Old Testament. These sacred texts explore prophetic theology and the teachings of monotheism to support social justice through compassionate ethical conduct, providing the basis of historical identity of the Jewish nation. Prophetic insight into the relation between God and humanity begins with God foretelling the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Action has consequences, but we have power to control our actions, by following God as our basis for hope, through restoration and repentance. The prophets call for justice, compassion, adherence and the sincerity of a personal relation to God, rejecting empty ritual.

The Christian Old Testament has a different order and interpretation from the Tanakh. Its role in confirming Christian faith derives from the prophet Isaiah, through the development of covenant and prophecies of the coming of Jesus.

The role of prophets is less about foretelling the future than about interceding between divine and mortal as an agent of God. For example, the prophet Jonah dealt with his situation in Nineveh by seeking to turn hearts to God through a message about the

consequences of alternative paths of action, about how God's people have to shape up, to deal with factors that decide tomorrow today.

The ongoing covenant of messianic hope looks forward to an awesome day that will change hearts. Prophets have no hesitation in taking the nation to task, within the context of emphasis on God's faithfulness. Our moral accountability creates responsibility to address contemporary challenges.

### **Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard on the work of hope**

Robbie Tulip

Christians for an Ethical Society held its annual dinner in August with Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard of the Benedictus Community as guest speaker. Here is a summary of her remarks.

In exploring the problem of despair about the climate crisis, debates about non-violent civil disobedience can be grounded in faith and prayer. However, much climate activism is detached from theology and spiritual practice, and from religious efforts to integrate the hearing of the cry of the earth and the cry of the oppressed. The distinctive contribution from the power of Christian hope has some ambiguity in difficult circumstances such as ecological action and the Voice referendum. Refusing to give up a falsifying optimism can make it impossible to discern wisdom.

Etty Hillesum was a Dutch Jew murdered by the Nazis. She wrote on the impact of false hope among those who could not bear their fate. Reflecting on such problems, the theologian Jurgen Moltmann discussed the space between assumption and despair, and how the character of hope must be transformed. Cynthia Bourgeault writes on mystical hope, trusting in the mercy of God.

Hope is usually tied to expected outcomes, with optimism that things will get better. Where some hope we can save the planet, others say give up on climate change. The Bible tells of God responding with rescue. When an outcome fails to eventuate, we can become hopeless. The Bible knows another kind of hope, erupting without reason in the face of what looks like an insoluble wrong. The prophet Habakkuk ([3:17](#)) wrote that even when crops fail he rejoices in the Lord. Not a stoic resigned endurance but a flooding light despite hopelessness. The book of Job tells of the agony of losses suffered where faith grows stronger amidst the wreckage of life, saying "I know that my redeemer lives" ([Job 19:25](#)). Can we taste something of this hope bubbling up in the pain of what we cannot change? A curious peace remains, whose source is a deeper encounter with God.

Amidst terrible misery, Etty Hillesum could walk with a spring in her step along the barbed wire, imagining how we will build a whole new world. Although looking like delusion or denial, such hope can provide some authenticity, seen in movements for justice and social change. Outcomes matter. It matters that First Australians take their rightful place, are honoured and contribute their gifts. Sources of hope reside more deeply than in prospects of success. Grounded in faith in our connection to transcendent love, the presence and energy of the living God draws us to fullness and peace, deepening and maintaining our connection to sources through a contemplative perspective. Practice of meditation can provide hope shaped by connection to the whole. The difficult truth of connection is shaped

by a mysterious upwelling, keeping faith with the promise of goodness as Jesus did, in accord with a promised future truth in the midst of fakery.

The confidence of love and joy can replace false cheer with calm equanimity. Hope flows out and gives courage, keeps faith with goodness, doesn't give up, and partakes of reality. When nothing is moving, we have traction in authentic hope even if we don't know what we are hoping for. Wait patiently. Hope regenerates life. The roots of hope in faith and prayer are not the whole story, yet we must recognise the spiritual dimension of ways of being. Positive change can be promoted through ceremony and prayer, as we reconnect with love for ourselves and the natural world. Not as a capacity to remain optimistic, but grounded in lived experience, bearing the energy of grace and hope in the midst of the chaos and despair that threaten to overwhelm bold speech and courageous action.

[Psalm 31:24](#) calls all who hope in the Lord to be strong and take heart. Faith, hope and love belong together, as theological virtues rooted in the being of things. When Paul connects foolishness to the wisdom of God, we are getting to ground zero, stripped of resources other than divine gift. The dynamic paschal gift of Christ brings us through death and despair to hope for a society of love building one another up. The church is meant to be that type of society, but that hasn't gone so well. Even when starting with good intentions, our disconnection from the source of systems of goodness can lead to moralistic expulsions. Utopian visions go wrong without a deeper rootedness in penitence and humility, doing what we have been asked to do in faith by Christ.

