

Perspective

Volume 22 Issue 100 | Winter 2016

The Movement
(re) discovering
the story



uniting
church
Canberra Region
Presbytery

Cover image: Rev. Karen Kime sharing stories at her seminar at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture during NAIDOC Week 2016. More on page 8.

Photo by **Jenny Rowland**.



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Perspective Q and A

- *How often do you publish Perspective and in what quantity?*
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- *What is the cost to Canberra Presbytery?*
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- *How is the document funded?*
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Beyond Festival

30 Sept – 3 Oct 2016

Greenhills Centre, Canberra

A chance to offer expertise or host a creative space.



Beyond is a boutique festival celebrating creativity, justice and genuine community. This is the second year it will run at Greenhills with camping onsite included in the ticket price. The 2016 Line-up is impressive with singers, poets, speakers and comedians, including: Lior, Megan Washington, Frank Yamma, and Professor Gilliam Triggs, just to name a few.

This year the Uniting Church will host the 'Glasshouse', one of four main tent venues. As such, **we have opportunity to offer our own expertise – speakers, facilitated workshops, kids' activities, alternate church experiences, and musicians – whatever we can come up with and commit to!** Rev Dr Jason John (Uniting Earth Ministry) will be our venue host and will work with me to pull our own little line-up together. Already City@ Night has committed to run a Church in the Forest session, the Tonga Youth will perform, and Jon O'Brien will facilitate a Christian meditation session.

Themes for the Festival are Indigenous Issues, Refugees, Global Poverty and Climate Change. We have many people about the Church who are passionate about these issues. **Would you like to host a creative space for an hour over the weekend to share information, have discussion and create community? Please put your ideas forward and commit to supporting Beyond – bgriffiths@uniting.org**

Uniting Church members are offered a **discount of \$25** off full weekend adult tickets when they put "Uniting" as a code on purchase. Go to <https://beyondfestival.com.au/> for tickets and more information.

Briony Griffiths, Uniting Church and Community Engagement, Canberra Region Presbytery.





Let's begin a conversation

“And let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint.” Galatians 6:9

The prayer from the Iona community is one for the world but it resonates here. It does seem that the world's winds have taken our breath away and that we're lost for words to tell our faith.

This is a very serious challenge, one raised at the recent Canberra regional gathering where the following question was asked:

How do we speak out Jesus and His message to the world in a way that fills that empty space where, generations ago, church and the Christian way was well understood as a familiar part of the cultural and social life of the time?

In today's world anxiety is high and hope is hard to find. If we don't step into that fear-filled space, who will? It is after all, what we are called to do. So, how to go about this pressing question which lies at the heart of our discipleship?

Mary and Martha might help us here. Mary chose to sit at Jesus feet, to be. Martha chose to serve others, to do.

The story is about more than differences in personalities and choices though, I would suggest it also tells us about the right order for our lives. Time with God first and all else second. If we choose to be a Mary first, a less fraught Martha may follow. Speaking as one with Martha tendencies, I understand the tension between the being and the doing. Finding contemplative prayer resolved that tension.

Prayer

Look at us, your church, hiding behind closed doors,

afraid of change,

anxious that even our embers will be quenched.

The world's winds have taken our breath away:

we're lost for words to tell our faith.

Come, Holy Spirit, kindle a spark in every soul,

cauterise our wounds, loosen our tongues,

warm our hearts, and - with our help -

make a cheerful bonfire of the stuff we don't need.

Change us, and then, in us,

light fires of love that will transform the world.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

**Jan Sutch Pickard.
Iona Community**

Giving God time as the first act each day for Him to speak should He choose to do so, or not, is a peaceful and soothing experience. Nothing is expected. It is simply a gift of time to God in a time poor world, time to let it come to you, whatever it might be. I encourage you to try it, to have the faith to put the prayer list aside and just be. Sitting with the question, meditating on it and waiting for guidance might be the best strategy of all for learning how to best talk about Jesus to others.

If we create the opportunity, the Holy Spirit is free to lead us. A month of Mary may be what we need.

The people at our Northern regional gathering explained that they speak through hospitality in its many lovely forms. We know how sharing food at the table enables conversation and friendships to grow. We, as a church, are hospitable people and sharing food is a non-threatening way to welcome the stranger, the neighbour and the one who is understandably tentative about joining a flock of Christians for the first time.

The call of Jesus is transformative as we well know and it is our privilege to be part of that call to others knowing well that Jesus can be found anywhere He chooses to be, at any time. I think it is important when sharing the good news to differentiate between Jesus, God incarnate, and the church. We know that the institution of the church deals with the necessary internal policy, legal compliance, property, finance and pastoral issues but it does so only in order to enable its people to be the people of Christ in the world.

Let us begin a conversation in this presbytery about how we can best share the life-giving news of a demanding, thrilling, humbling and intimately loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Which church in your region will host a conversation?

**Vanessa Crimmins
Presbytery Chairperson**



Home church at Rye Park

On the second Sunday of the month the congregation gathers at 6.30 pm for a home church service. Garry Southwell continues:

Home church at Rye Park began when one of our regular elderly members found it hard to attend services at the church, so we offered to take church to her. This consists of a less formal style of service followed by a meal with everyone contributing.

This was always a finger food style meal, where people stood around in groups to eat. However, given the age and health of some of the congregation they were needing to sit down and so we suggested everyone sat around the table.

The change was very obvious from the first time; holding hands around the table to give thanks and making a connection which was sometimes missing when people split into small groups.

Now people were sharing over the meal with everyone rather than a select few. It was more inclusive, more encouraging and more family oriented. No one is left out even if they are not feeling particularly social or hungry.

We see the ads on TV now encouraging families to come to the table, to come together, communicate and share their day. The same has happened here where people now share their week, family joys and hardships, community needs etc as a group.

Moving forward, this less formal style would seem a good option for encouraging those on the fringe to attend. Already we have a couple of folk who attend these services, who don't attend our more traditional service.

Garry Southwell
Rye Park Congregation



For such a time as this

A brief report on the family violence prayer booklet distributed at the last Presbytery Meeting

Cost: the generosity of our congregations and others has been such a blessing. One gentleman who wishes to remain anonymous provided half total costs. All costs have been fully covered.

Distribution (not exhaustive) began at our initiative but in most cases was requested. The booklet has gone far and wide to cover all our Presbytery congregations and faith communities, NSW.ACT Synod participants, all Synods/Moderators, Assembly President, Uniting Theological College, The Family Violence Forum held in Canberra, Hospitals here and in Sydney, a dentist's rooms, the Anglican Church in Tasmania courtesy of the Quakers, The Catholic and Anglican Canberra Goulburn dioceses, The Uniting Women's Conference, The Quakers National Conference, The Quakers meeting of Canberra, The Lutheran Social and Bioethics National Committee, Catholic Women's prayer groups in and around Bateman's Bay, The Canberra Interfaith Forum, an employee of the Australian Tax Office, an officer in the Navy.

The booklet is online at www.canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/documents/bklet.pdf



Editorial

In doing *Perspective*, one thing that gives me joy is when articles arrive out of the blue yet still tie in with the set theme or unexpectedly highlight and complement a secondary theme.

So it is that this time we find the theme of hospitality happily wending its way through this issue of *Perspective* alongside the set theme: "The movement - (re)discovering the story", which was sparked by discussion on narrative at the May Presbytery meeting. (See Rev Chris Lockley's and Rev Kerry Bartlett's articles on pages 7 and 9.)

The significance of hospitality and how it is done in the life of a congregation is apparent in the story on this page by Garry Southwell from Rye Park near Yass. His was one of several such stories shared spontaneously at the regional gathering of congregations from the northern part of our Presbytery, inspiring Kevin to write the article on the next page.

We're hoping that you too might be inspired to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and share with us all, the good news about hospitality in your congregation.

Carolyn McAllister
Editor

PS If you would like to know more about the **Regional Gatherings** (Coastal, Northern, Central) that we arrange from time to time and even come along to the next one, have a look online: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/2015/crp-regional-gatherings-coastal-northern-central-areas, or speak to your Minister or Church Council members.



Food and hospitality

I was asked recently “Why are we spending so long on ‘Marks of the Movement’? Aren’t there other issues we could be looking at?”

My answer to the second question is “Yes”. Of course there are other issues we could be looking at: social justice issues like affordable housing; church issues like the Property Sales Proceeds Policy; educational issues like what sort of training is needed for our congregations who are no longer able to afford or attract a ministry leader; and more.

My answer to the first question? It is as simple and as complex as this: the institution of the church, that most of us grew up in and that we are still part of, can be so powerful in its expectations of us all that it takes us a long time to be able to hear what the Spirit is saying to us about the church we are called to become rather than the church we think we must preserve.

The voice of the institution is so persistent and so familiar to us that we have to be similarly persistent until the other voice, the voice of Jesus who calls us to leave behind all that prevents us from following him (Luke 9:57-60 and many others), is heard with equal, if not greater, clarity.

From heaviness to hope

And as so often happens, not long after being asked those two questions I found myself at the Regional Gathering of Church Council Office-bearers, Lay Leaders and Ministry Agents of our country congregations and the voice of the Movement began to speak clearly. It happened like this –

Our Chairperson, Vanessa, began the day by asking “What has changed since we met last year?”

... hospitality continues to give voice to the Movement of the Gospel alongside and at times in conflict with, the institution ...

The first answers included: “We have grown older”, “We are concerned that our volunteers can’t continue to meet the requirements of their roles”, “The amount of work required of our Treasurer is getting too much”.

Clearly the institution was weighing everyone down.

Then the voice of the Movement spoke up: “We are starting to hold lunches because we have realised that although we have been worshipping together for many years we really do not know each other. We hope the meals will turn that around.”

And immediately the mood changed.

Another person then had their own story of the way eating together is opening up relationships with people who do not attend worship nor declare to have any faith. Then another, and another: stories of the importance of food; of eating together around a table; of actually having conversations that are more than superficial; of the discovery of joy in relationship; of the sacredness of eating together; of communion.

This was more than providing food for the needy, a necessary and important thing for us to be doing. This was inviting the other into our lives and entering into the lives of others in a way that could form us into a new community where real hospitality, hospitality that is mutual, becomes a passage into Grace.

Yes, the mood had changed; there was hope in the room.

A mark of the movement?

This is where I began to ask myself, “Have we, today, discovered one of the marks of the movement?”

Then I remembered how Jesus ate with sinners; invited himself to a tax-collector’s home for a meal; facilitated a meal of thousands of people; broke bread with his disciples.

Yes, Jesus did it before us. Not as a strategy to get people into the church but as an honest expression of the hospitality/grace of God that moved him. I think that is also a mark of the Movement of Jesus. The goal is not to recruit people to take over our roles in the institution. The goal of the Movement is to experience the reality of being part of a community of Grace, whatever form that may take.

Throughout the history of the Church the centrality of food, eating together, hospitality continues to give voice to the Movement of the Gospel alongside of, and at times in conflict with, the institution of the Church. I am thinking of the Benedictines and their focus on hospitality, and the Methodists and the importance for them of the Agape Meal.

Is it possible that the power of the Institution will be overcome or balanced by the simple act of eating and drinking together? That brief experience at the Regional Gathering may suggest an answer to that question.

Kevin Dilks
Presbytery Minister (Pastoral and Administration)



Finding direction in a strange landscape

At the last two Canberra Region Presbytery gatherings, we have explored the theological and theoretical issues related to living in the tension between the necessary order of institution and the desire to be a movement of the Spirit. At this gathering of the presbytery we move towards discerning the more practical consequences of living in this particular landscape. Moving to the practical will for some come as a welcome change. For others it will bring anxiety as inevitable change becomes closer and more tangible.

In the mid 1960's and early 70's a number of churches re-started the conversation around church union and by 1971 the founding churches of the Uniting Church had agreed on a Basis for Union. It is quite clear that the *Basis of Union* (BoU), the document that shapes the Uniting Church, is influenced by the events and assumptions of the post war years and the turmoil of the 60's and 70's.

I would argue that at this time, people generally gave expression to their lives through public institutions, that loyalty to authority and institutions was mostly unquestioned (although this was changing) and social interaction in the public sphere happened to a large extent through institutional events.

Past assumptions

The church made a number of assumptions about society and the way in which people interacted. This is reflected in the practical structure of the Uniting Church. Although the formal parts and their roles are deeply rooted in reformed theological tradition, the way in which they fit together reflects a number of assumptions of the time.

The Basis of Union assumes

- that there will be large numbers of people interacting in an autonomous congregation
- that congregations would have at least one minister or, in the more rural and outer regional centres, clusters of congregations would share a minister or two in a "parish"
- that people would participate in sharing their "gifts"¹, with an ordained minister giving leadership generally and sacramental ministry² in particular.

The church assumed that an increasingly educated laity with time and commitment to give would populate the other councils of the church. These councils would exercise discernment in their decision-making process and in the spirit of the age would work collaboratively.

Very few of those assumptions now remain intact. Increasingly congregations like those in the Coast and South of the presbytery no longer have the capacity to call their own minister.

1 Basis of Union 1992 edition Paragraph 13

2 Ibid 14

Of the 14 worshipping centres only two in a "parish" like structure support a full time ministry agent in their own right. Another two congregations working together support two half time placements. Many struggle to maintain their Church Council's office holders let alone the wider church representation on the various councils.

Discernment - directions to follow

If these assumptions no longer hold then does the BoU still give us anything to work with? I believe it gives our discerning as a presbytery two major directions to follow.

Direction 1: "Congregations" give primary expression, but not the only expression to being the "embodiment in the one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church"³. That assumes that a "minister" is not what makes us a "congregation"; a position many assumed in the past. The scriptures talk to us about a gathering of God's people being "where two or three are gathered in my name"⁴. This helps reassure us that faithful disciples of Jesus are God's people where they are – they are in that sense a "congregation".

Primarily the resources of a minister or buildings do not define being a congregation; rather it is by being faithful disciples. Ministers have a particular role in this to "equip the saints for the work of ministry"⁵, to remind disciples of the Jesus story and enable them to theologically reflect on the context of ministry.

Direction 2: The inter-conciliar nature of the Uniting Church is a pale but significant reflection of the churches understanding of the nature of God as Trinitarian, as community. Often described as a three-way dance of the Trinity, God the Father taking the lead, and then stepping back for the Son and then the Spirit to lead. God does not exist in isolation from the other expressions of the Godhead but is always in community interacting. This image leads us as a presbytery in our discerning and encourages us to be accountable to each other, to form community with each other and to discern God's missional leading together.

These two main ideas can help us as we navigate our way to practical outcomes in this strange landscape between the necessity of order and the flexibility of responding to God's powerful work of "reconciliation and renewal"⁶.

Geoff Wellington

Presbytery Minister (Mission and Education)

3 Ibid 15 (a)

4 Matthew 18:20 NRSV

5 Ephesians 4: 12 NRSV

6 Basis of Union 1992 edition Paragraph 3

Narrative and the search for meaning

by Chris Lockley



In this issue of Perspective, Rev Chris Lockley and Rev Kerry Bartlett continue where they left off in cross-table conversations at the last Presbytery meeting; sharing their insights into our cultural narrative.

Turn to page 9 for Kerry's article.

In preparing my sermon a few weeks ago on the parable of the Samaritan who demonstrated compassion, I reflected how an increasing segment of the population – in particular younger people – would miss the significance of the Samaritan being the hero of the story.

For many “Samaritan” is now used to refer to someone who shows kindness. They would not realise that Samaritans were a people held in contempt by Jewish people of the time.

In a subsequent discussion a person referred to the Samaritan as “non-religious” – in comparison to the religious authorities who walked by the injured person. Again, there was no awareness that Samaritans had an alternative religion to Judaism that they practised devoutly – and this too was part of the scandalous nature of the story.

At one level these misunderstandings point to a decline in awareness of the Christian narrative in western society. A similar point was made by a colleague at a recent meeting of Presbytery: the context for mission today is a culture with “no narrative”, a society that is secular in nature, which has a diminishing number of reference points to Christianity. How are we to speak the gospel into that context?

My response then, as it is now, is that our culture does have a narrative – it’s just different to ours. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that Australians have many narratives, and in some cases have re-imagined narratives. The Christian narrative is regarded as just one of many faith narratives.

Hugh Mackay in his most recent book, “Beyond Belief – how we find meaning with or without religion”, reminds us that while only 15% of the Australian population attends church at least monthly, 61% claim a Christian faith. This would seem to suggest that while church attendance has been declining (Mackay thinks it has bottomed out and is unlikely to fall lower) people have not rejected the core story. People still find the message of Jesus helpful, but they reject the institutional and dogmatic package it comes wrapped in. As a bumper sticker states: “I quite like God. It’s his fan club I can’t stand.”

Alongside this trend is a growing number of people ticking “No religion” in the census (22% in 2011). However we would be mistaken to assume that “No religion” means atheist. Respondents write a number of qualifiers against this category, with only 1.2% stating they are atheist. Various research suggests 10-16% of Australians identify as atheist.

A growing phenomenon is the significant number of people who identify as “SBNR”, i.e. “spiritual, but not religious”. No doubt a significant number of these people make up the 46% who say they are Christian but don’t attend church. I’m sure this also includes people from other religious backgrounds who do not practise that religion.

There is no single definition of what SBNR-ers mean by “spiritual” – or, for that matter, how they understand “religious”. Mackay gives a good overview of different understandings of “spiritual”, several of which would be familiar to the Christian narrative. I suspect the rejection of “religion” reflects a loss of trust in the institution of the church (along with other established institutions).

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Narrative and the search for meaning by Chris Lockley



Rather than trivialising this growing phenomenon, or as some in the church do, attacking it as the enemy, it is important for us to listen respectfully to what is being said by SBNR-ers. These are our neighbours, after all. Often they are the ones with whom the church has broken trust. They have looked on at the church's abuse and been horrified. They question how we can act as if we still have moral authority. They have seen an institution defending and justifying itself.

But still SBNR-ers search for meaning. Still they seek a connection with life and God deeper than a purely materialistic worldview. It is important to listen to their criticisms and humbly learn what we can from them. It is also important to identify where they look for spiritual meaning i.e. to listen to their narrative.

Perhaps this diversity of spiritual narratives is a reaction against something that has been around for quite a while. I call it RWBS (religious without being spiritual). We might have a good hard look at ourselves to see if we have been practicing that!

While I hope we will enter into dialogue without condescension or superiority, I am not suggesting uncritical acceptance of everything involved in the SBNR trend. I find it ironic, for instance, that there is a SBNR website (<http://www.sbnr.org>) which shows some signs of an emerging, organisational (religious?) identity. Could it be that some SBNR-ers unconsciously feel the loss of community, with its rituals and accompanying sense of connectedness, and are organising themselves – in a non-religious way, of course.

Ideally, our belief narrative is both spiritual and religious. Richard Rohr (in "Falling upwards") writes of "religion" having its roots in the Latin *re ligio*, which is related to the words 'ligaments' or 'connections'. He suggests religion, when it is at its best, re-connects us to something greater than ourselves – a recurring concern of the SBNR. Perhaps we have more in common with those exploring different faith narratives than we suspect.

Chris Lockley,
Minister of St Margaret's and St James



Storylines speaking through country

Rev Karen Kime's seminar at Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

On Thursday 7 July Rev. Karen Kime, a Biripi woman from northern NSW, gave a seminar entitled "Storylines – Speaking through Country" at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton ACT. Karen is an Indigenous Academic at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga NSW and Archdeacon of Indigenous Ministries for the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.



Jenny Rowland

In a most engaging presentation Karen spoke about the importance of Country at birth, death and throughout life. It is identity for Aboriginal people. The care of their Country and people is spiritual as well as physical. Aboriginal people live as a collective for the common good, sharing and being interdependent.



Aboriginal people are natural story-tellers. They use stories to transmit knowledge about culture, values

and laws to the next generation. There are public stories and sacred stories only for some people. Karen spoke of stories about moieties and other means by which Aboriginal groups are divided for social interactions like marriage. Stories may be only for adults, with resurrection messages akin to those of the much more recent Christian Gospels. Some stories have been told for countless generations.

NAIDOC WEEK 2016

NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee.

NAIDOC Week activities are held across Australia to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In 2016 NAIDOC's theme was "Songlines: The living narrative of our nation".

Karen enjoyed recounting a number of multi-layered stories that appeal and make sense to Aboriginal people of different ages and different Countries. She asked the audience to react to the stories on a range of levels.

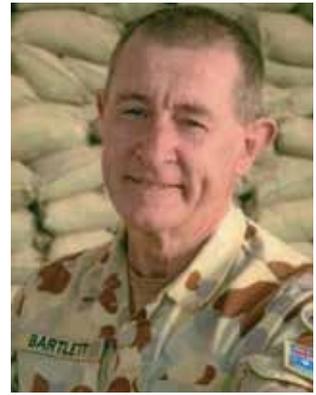
As well showing respect for people, Aboriginal stories show respect for other living things.

Jenny Rowland
Canberra City Congregation

Even the stones will cry out!

by Kerry Bartlett

Possibly my first experience and appreciation of Australian history and at the same time initiation into the workforce came when I was a teenager. It was as a result of working in a tourist shop in George Street Nth, Sydney in the 1960's. The shop at which I worked was overshadowed by the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Just nearby was the remnants of the old Tarpeian Quarry once used to furnish stone for many of Sydney's government buildings. Historical references in the immediate area are legion.



Then, as now, Sydney streets were under repair. I remember one day when George Street Nth was excavated and the original road-system exposed. Two or three inches of black tarred surface covered the original wooden cobbled blocks that replaced the original tracks in Old Sydney Town. The cobbled blocks took their design from the old cobbled roads of London; the cobbles used to replace gravel roads. And both had been used for thousands of years in the Old Country. Some few hundred metres from where I worked the Tank Stream still existed, and like the cobbled roads screened out of sight just below the surface of the ground. The tank stream was originally identified as a source of much needed fresh water by Governor Phillip and as a good place to situate our fledgling colony. The Tank Stream was previously a source of life and sustainability for Aboriginal peoples; resourcing them with fish, and a wide variety of marine life, fresh water and a place to meet for millennia.

My second encounter with our emergent history was at Wauchope NSW; the small timber town of historical interest in our memory of Australian pioneers. Dad retired and settled just adjacent to the cross-roads between Port Macquarie and Wauchope. The intersection was comprised of the road-systems that ran between Wauchope and Port Macquarie, east and west, and the road running north and south; the Pacific Highway. Just adjacent to the intersection Dad cleared the trees of this new property. As he ran the plough over the ground, ancient stone implements came to the surface. Heavy objects often rise to the surface when the ground is tilled, ploughed or dug.

Cross-roads

Upon sustained reflection on the stone artefacts, we realised that the cross-roads marked a ritual site of very ancient origins. The intersection was a place of meeting, a place of exchange marking the gestures of reciprocity between tribes of different languages and customs as they made the long walkabout north and south, east and west in the Dreamtime pilgrimage. The cross-roads was originally a place to stop, refresh, renew, reflect and rest.

As Dad dug and cultivated the soil at Port Macquarie he did not look for history; history came looking for him. The region's own prehistory held an intention and energy of its own. We did not uncover the stones; they uncovered us. In similar fashion, when I was a teenager I discovered that only a short distance below the surface of things there exists, more often than not, out of sight and out of mind, a history that asks to be acknowledged. And sometimes when we chance to forget, the stones themselves will arise and shout!

It is difficult to compare the history of Australia's original peoples with European settlement. In some cases the present day's road systems follow the tracks of Australian pioneers and the pioneers followed even more ancient systems of ancient Aboriginal pilgrimage. Both Aboriginal peoples and pioneers travelled slowly, cautiously and with ritual, ceremony and story and, with the gesture of the gift of reciprocity, sustained and nurtured each other. I don't believe this to be the case today. Today as we engage an intersection or cross-roads we slow down for just a short time, if at all, until the green light gives the go ahead;

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Even the stones will cry out!

by Kerry Bartlett

then we move on our way. In ancient times the intersections were places to pause and reflect and exchange goods, language, gesture of ritual and resource others with information essential for survival.



On our modern roads we travel very fast and arrive nowhere just as quickly. The difference between us and the ancients is that they did indeed travel very, very slowly. But the slow movement does not in any way obscure the reality that they needed to move to survive, that pilgrimage was second nature, people moved in waves of migration; and unless I am mistaken this is still the case today.

My consideration now, as then, is how did we get here? The road map, indeed the GPS, will assure us we are not lost; but in many ways we are. We have indeed landed at shores we now call Australian but we have not yet arrived in a manner of healthful psychological, spiritual or emotional or soulful being.

Perhaps the stones are there to remind us that in the movement forward to where we believe we are intent on going, we need to engage the stones just there below the surface. Thank goodness the stones were happy to rise to the surface and ask my Dad and me to meditate and reflect on their existence. The past is present with us and this is a comforting thought; even the very ancient past is not far away, just around the corner, just out of sight, just there under our very feet!

The past causes us to slow down but it does not ask that we stop. Ancient stones rise to the surface of the ground; like dreams unbidden from Aboriginal Dreamtime. They ask us to stop, take notice and reflect.

The pilgrimage continues as was begun with Father Abraham as he left with family for places unknown to the south of ancient Canaan and, as the ancient Scripture reminds us, that land, as is ours, was in the grip of drought/famine. Christ himself exclaimed that even he had no place to lay his head.

How did we get here? Perhaps the stones may help us with an answer!

Kerry Bartlett



Let's get behind Anti-Poverty Week

Anti-Poverty Week is about strengthening public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia. During the week, individuals, communities, organisations and governments are encouraged to take action in some way to generate discussion, conduct research or raise awareness of poverty. Last year the Uniting Church was a strong supporter of Anti-Poverty Week, hosting about 10 activities across Canberra and Queanbeyan.

Queanbeyan Uniting Church organised and hosted a combined Church service with other denominations. **St Margaret's, Hackett** had a special service with a guest speaker. Bill Bush

This year churches of all denominations are being encouraged to put a message on their public billboards.

The message is:
End Poverty = Transformed Communities.

This can be localised to read:
End Poverty = Transformed Queanbeyan (or Canberra, Yass or Goulburn).

Perhaps take a photo of your noticeboard and let us know so we can count them and also send the message viral online that week.

wrote a discussion piece published by the Canberra Times that reflected work of the **Presbytery Social Justice Group**. It will be great to add to this line up in 2016.

Be creative and give me a yell if you need some support to make things happen.

For more information contact Briony Griffiths – bgriffiths@uniting.org or visit <http://www.antipovertyweek.org.au/>

**Briony Griffiths
Church and Community
Engagement**

Orlando

and the truth of hospitality



Rev Jean Shannon, gave the following sermon at St James Uniting Church, Curtin, just after her return from Jacksonville, USA.

Bible reading Luke 10:1-11 Jesus sends out the 70.

It occurs to me that the 70 missionaries were sent out with rather limited instructions. There was no manual. No wonder the apostle Paul thought a few more details were necessary and so he added them in his letters to the frontier congregations. Remember Paul was a great believer in rules and governance.

The Jesus movement was not yet ordered. The only rules that existed were the old rules and Jesus had broken most of them to make a point at some time or another: he ate with gentiles (and ate what was given him), he talked to women, he touched the unclean and he 'worked' on the Sabbath – just to name a few.

Now there was a problem. People far away from the centre of theological development were susceptible to influence from any plausible preacher explaining how they should live their lives. Some of these preachers were on an entirely different path.

We live in troubled times – as they once did; and in times of great fear and change – strong leaders are comforting. To some, good strong religion with easy to follow rules is attractive – especially when it can offer simple, black and white responses to what seems like a crumbling society. But we live with doubt and in an ambiguous world – certainty can be over-simplistic... and sometimes not very Christian.

Orlando. I was staying with my cousin in Jacksonville, 140 miles away from Orlando when 54 people died in the nightclub shooting. At the same time Floridians were lining up to give blood, many were calling for less gun control. It defies common sense; but then so much of what I heard and saw could not make sense to me.

The Westboro Baptist church of Kansas hosts the godehatesfags.com website where they announce their activities to 'bring peace and love' to the world. This church picketed the funeral of the Charlestown church victims because they didn't believe the dead shared their politics. It makes no sense.

When Westboro tried to picket a funeral of one of the Pulse nightclub victims, a spontaneous human shield formed of priests, young people, LGBTI community, bikers, office workers and anyone who got the message. Mums and dads with no connection to the gay community, drove into town and joined the shield.

People cut holes in sheets and wore them with their arms stretched out to block the mourners from seeing the picket line. Later the media called them 'angels'.

The crowd flew 'God is love' banners which had become the unofficial Orlando motto as the city worked through its pain. Throughout the day, the crowd hummed 'Amazing Grace' softly - 'amazing grace how sweet the sound'. Meanwhile, every politician and celebrity making a living from being on the front page made a statement. Two gunshops decided to raffle automatic rifles to 'raise money for the victims'. The LBGTO community felt violated by the publicity when what they said they needed was action and acceptance. The spontaneous demonstration was just that.

So much of Luke is about hospitality.

A Theology professor once asked her students what would be the hardest part of being one of the 70. One student said, 'eating what is put in front of you'. A few weeks ago, we had the story of the woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears and wiping him dry with her hair. That would make me very uncomfortable.

Our readings have Jesus on his way to Jerusalem and we are invited to walk with him. We are called to examine customs we create to protect our comfort zones. We begin with hospitality. Being the guest is not always easy. Being gracious to others when we don't necessarily share their lifestyles or viewpoints is very uncomfortable. We have to own our discomfort as guests, sucking it up, no matter what we are fed. Surely our actions are to gracefully receive. To receive is much harder than to give and so I disputed those who believed that Westboro Baptist Church is bringing the kingdom of God nearer. Jesus had the discipline and grace to let that woman wash his feet.

Mary Luti says (www.ucc.org/daily_devotional_how_we_heal) "The truth about humans is that we're broken. The larger truth is that we heal. The even larger truth is that we heal each other. We have the power, often by the simplest of acts, to help each other. The miracle isn't the healing. The miracle is that one person decides not to stand aloof from another person's pain. The greatest need we have is to be treated with care, treated like human beings, but because that's so rare, when it happens it seems miraculous."

I cried as I heard the soft humming – amazing grace. Michael Leunig said "love with all your heart – it is as simple and as difficult as that!" ... that is the best instruction we can manage. Amen.

Jean Shannon, Hospital Chaplaincy Coordinator



Truly Civil Society

Serious Church Business As I was busy one morning getting the kids and myself ready to head off to school and work, I explained to my 5 year old that I had a meeting that morning at Gungahlin Uniting Church. To this she replied, “Why don’t you get a serious job Mum?” ...apparently Dad’s job is serious as he earns money for all of us. I assured her that I do too and I listed off all the things I pay for – the child care, the swimming lessons, the ballet lessons, the new tap shoes, etc. My husband and I pondered this in the car on the way to work. Did she not link Church with her notion of work because of her own Sunday church experiences? Or did she think that Church wasn’t about money?Or (more likely) was she just making it all up as she went along? Either way, it gave us a giggle.

Truly Civil Society Forum

That morning I was meeting with Rev. Mark Faulkner to reflect on the Truly Civil Society Forum held at Gungahlin UC on the 4th June. The Forum in its own right had touched on some very serious issues. It was an opportunity for people to explore and reflect on what it means for society to be truly civil and to further consider how the Church helps to shape community in this way.

Guest speakers – Eva Cox, AO, and Rev. Kent Crawford, Sydney Presbytery - inspired and energised 34 participants who came from the Uniting Church, Synod, Uniting, ACTCOSS, Christians for an Ethical Society, the Canberra Alliance, and the Canberra Inter-Faith Forum. In open space style sessions, participants were also invited to ‘set the agenda’ by presenting topics or questions that they felt should be further explored throughout the day.



The highlight of the day was guest speaker, Eva Cox, AO - an Australian writer, feminist, sociologist, social commentator and activist. Eva challenged participants that previously it was a more optimistic time. People believed that social change was possible. There was a view that we need to have politics about the common good, about society, not just the economy. She noted that economics doesn’t deal with relationships, feelings, sharing, caring, acting collectively, belonging, and respect for others. Yet these are all things that help make up a good life and a good society. Eva’s view is that we have got to reclaim the social as an essential part of what it means to have a good society. She noted that the community is fantastic when it is inclusive - when it has a lot of trust between strangers (bridging social capital) - when it is open, there is a sense of collaboration, the common good and the collective.

The Forum - If you couldn’t join us on the day and you would like a copy of guest speaker or discussion notes, please email bgriffiths@uniting.org

She challenged participants that we need to say what is going wrong and put up the alternatives. We need broad, courageous visions and ideas to shape a truly civil society.

As Executive Minister of Sydney Presbytery, Rev. Kent Crawford, has a passion to see churches make a significant contribution to building community, acting for justice and nourishing faith within their local contexts. He cited practical stories from the London Citizens UK, the Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) in the USA, and the work of the Sydney Alliance.



He also referred to an online booklet called Just Church by the Contextual Theology Centre in London to assist local churches engage with and even transform their neighbourhoods.

Reflection

The Forum generated 13 topics for discussion. These ranged from very specific practical topics such as:

- *Communicating with active retirees to embrace change and to feel worthwhile,*
- *Housing for the poor and disadvantaged*
- *Moving Beyond the Church Building;*

to questions like:

- *Can we live a religious life without being religious?*
- *How can we reintroduce the notion of the common good into public discourse?*

Participants were encouraged to consider ways that we might practically or actively respond to our passion and interest to help shape a more civil society through these topics. Whilst it was hoped that no one would feel like they were being asked to ‘do more’, this was a day to see where and how the spirit led and to remember that where two or three are gathered... who knows what might eventuate.

Since June, a number of practical things have happened: Jennifer Rowland published an article about the forum in the magazine of Canberra City Uniting Church, Bill Bush has drafted a paper about Drug Law Reform and its implications for many of the issues Eva Cox raised, the Presbytery Social Justice Group has reflected on the day, and consideration has been given to how we can actively pursue these topics at the upcoming Beyond Festival and through our Church Anti-Poverty Week activities in October. Who knew that Church business could be so serious. ☺

Briony Griffiths, Church and Community Engagement Consultant, bgriffiths@uniting.org



Rev Riana Kok, minister from Yarralumla UC hands a cheque to Harold Wotherspoon of St Columba's, a member of the Safe Shelter Management Committee.

Photo: Gaye Buchanan, Yarralumla.

Homelessness Relief

Safe Shelter ACT & Yarralumla Uniting Church's "Thrifty Fifty Initiative" came together at St Columba's.

On Thursday the 2nd of June, representatives of Safe Shelter ACT and Yarralumla Uniting Church came together due to a shared concern: "Homelessness".

Alice Ferguson explained Safe Shelter (see below) and Riana Kok explained the "Thrifty fifty initiative".

So Yarralumla Uniting Church now has little recyclable ziplock bags with "Thrifty Fifty" labels on, available for people to take home any Sunday and, when filled with fifty cent pieces, to be placed along with offerings in the Sunday collection bag.

It is a simple idea that can be used independently by your church, workplace or school.

For more information please contact Riana Kok, minister of Yarralumla Uniting Church, riana652@gmail.com

Thrifty fifty initiative

We want to sow the seeds of this project far and wide.

Give your every 50 cent piece towards homelessness relief.

Who knows what can happen if all start "chippin' in"?

Safe Shelter ACT is into its fourth winter providing emergency shelter for homeless men at Lewis Hall, St Columba's Uniting Church, Braddon. It is available Tuesday - Thursday from 7.00pm to 7.00am until 29 September, providing somewhere safe, warm and dry for guests to sleep (plus a hot drink and biscuits). The Shelter is staffed by teams of adult volunteers, male and female, who sleep on the floor just like the guests, for one night each month. The hall is located within easy walking distance of Uniting Care Canberra City's wonderful Early

"By collecting our fifty cent coins throughout each week it has become a constant reminder in our household that we have homelessness in our city and that we have to create further awareness if we are hoping to find ways to address it."

Norm Schroeder Yarralumla Church Council Chair

Morning Centre where a nourishing breakfast is served and access to showers is available and where those in need are helped to link in to ACT support and welfare agencies.

Obviously no one hall can be used to host a Shelter every night or it would become a permanent hostel, so the next step for Safe Shelter ACT is to increase the number of city venues so that, eventually, there can be at least one emergency shelter open for homeless men in inner Canberra every night in Winter. To achieve that, Safe Shelter is seeking donations to help pay to upgrade other halls so they can accommodate sleepers overnight, typically just the hard-wired smoke detection and building certification costs.

Yarralumla Uniting Church "Thrifty Fifty Initiative" donation

A recent donation was received from Yarralumla Uniting Church's congregation through their "Thrifty Fifty Initiative". It will make a big difference to Safe Shelter's expansion plans. It is with sincere gratitude that Safe Shelter thanks members of Yarralumla Uniting Church in recognition of their compassionate outreach to the homeless men of Canberra.

Alice Ferguson, Safe Shelter Management Committee, safeshelteract@gmail.com

Faith and Identity

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman - A Reflection on the Gospel of John ch. 4: 1-41



Ranjini Wickramaratne-Rebera, an international speaker, writer, educator and facilitator in creative processes for reading and studying the Bible, is a member of Gungahlin Uniting Church. Ranjini has written reflective bible studies on two stories of women's encounters with Jesus, one on the Canaanite woman and one on the Samaritan Woman, the latter partially reproduced here. **The complete studies can be downloaded at:** www.canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/documents/studies.pdf

Introduction

The writer of John's Gospel uses words as symbols to indicate Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Through the history of Christianity sayings such as "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" have been recognized as the words of Jesus. Today words such as witness, sin, discipleship 'follow me' are associated with the language and identity of the church.

Words symbolize who we are as they express our thoughts and experiences. For the Samaritan woman her identity related to her ethnicity and her tasks in a household. Her search for water was a daily task.

For Jesus water was a symbol of 'living water' that identified him as the Messiah. How does the vocabulary of the church define its identity? What messages do familiar 'church' words convey to those who do not participate in the life of a church?

My retelling of the story of Jesus' encounter with a woman from Samaria is written as a Reflection rather than in the traditional Bible study format. The contemporary story of Anil and Paula is my creation as a story teller and creative writer. **Ranjini Rebera**

"It is my hope that time will be set aside for personal reflection and group reflections in Church Councils, Pastoral care groups, Bible Study groups, Women and Youth groups; for conversation focused on the stories and their relevance for today's church and secular society."

A Search for Water

I checked the water jars. They needed re-filling so I picked up an empty jar and left for the well. The noon day sun was scorching but I was used to this daily trek. As Jacob's Well came into sight I stopped. A stranger was seated by the well. I looked around and there was no one else in sight. I wondered if I should retreat and come back later. Would the man attack me? It was a long way back and I would need to walk back again. I decided to take a chance and walked slowly towards the well.

I froze when the man spoke to me and asked for a drink of water. As I looked closer I realised that he was a Jew and that he shouldn't have been asking me – a Samaritan woman - for a drink. It was not acceptable to both our cultures. I picked up courage and asked him how he expected to draw water when he didn't have a bucket. My mind was racing with questions. He replied that I didn't know what God wanted to give me. He went on to claim that I didn't know who he was and that he could give me the water that gives life.

I was curious. I needed to know what he was talking about. So I questioned him again. How could he possibly draw life giving water from this well which we had used for years. It was the well that our ancestor Jacob had dug for everyone to use. I couldn't resist asking if he thought that he was greater than Jacob! He didn't answer my question. Instead he went on about the living water that he could give me that would never make me thirsty again. That this water would give me life that was eternal. I decided that I should ask for this water so that I wouldn't need to walk to the well everyday.

I was embarrassed when he replied by asking me to go and bring my husband. I looked away and mumbled that I didn't have a husband. I was amazed when he responded that he knew that I had had five husbands and that the man I was living with now was not my husband. How did he know this, I thought. I had to change the subject because I didn't want him to probe deeper into my personal life. So I talked about how my ancestors had worshipped at Mount Gerizim which we could see, and didn't the Jews worship in Jerusalem?

Again he didn't answer my question. Instead he continued to share with me things I had never heard of before. He talked of God as Fathe, about the Spirit that would guide true worshippers. I was mesmerized. I began to think that perhaps this man was the Messiah, the one who would be called the Christ.

What does the Samaritan woman's story say to us today?

.../continued from previous page

His next words would stay with me forever. He said "I am the one and I am speaking to you now". Our conversation was interrupted when a few of his followers returned. They looked suspiciously at both of us. I left my jar at the well and ran.

I was excited and decided to share my encounter with anyone in my town who would listen. I was so happy when I persuaded many of them to come back with me to meet the man who was the Messiah.

When we returned we saw him in deep conversation with the men who had brought him food. We joined them and listened to what he was saying. Many of the towns people believed him. Some invited him to stay longer. He did. He stayed two days in the town. Many more Samaritan people believed in him.

Why was I not surprised when some said to me that they had faith in Jesus, not because of what I had said but because they had heard him for themselves. It made me happy when I heard some of them refer to Jesus as the Saviour of the World.

And to think that all this happened because I went to Jacob's Well for water!

Pause and reflect on the story.

The Samaritan woman didn't hesitate to ask hard questions. Are we intimidated by conversations on theology and Bible texts that we may not understand?

In our culture that values personal privacy and the importance of a nuclear family, how would we respond to a stranger asking very personal questions?

Paula stacked the dishwasher while keeping an eye on the time.

"You've got ten minutes to leave," Anil called out from the study.

"No problem. I am nearly ready."

Anil appeared in the kitchen and placed his empty coffee cup on the kitchen bench.

"Thanks. I'll try not to be too late," Paula replied as she wiped down the bench.

"You know this is a losing project don't you?" he asked.

"Not at all. There are two new migrants coming in today."

Anil walked back to his study saying, "We'll talk about it when you return." He shut the study door. Paula drove away to meet the three others in the team that ran the church programme for new migrants. She was glad to get away.

Two hours later Paula returned home. Her mind was still on the conversations and time with the migrant group. She thought about the stories that were shared around the table. The two new refugees who hesitantly shared their stories since they were not fluent in English. So much sadness but still they survived. Paula smiled when she recalled the question from one of the group about the church and what it was about. None of her team had been able to respond adequately, thought Paula. What could they have said anyway.

Paula parked the car and walked indoors. Anil was seated at the table with open files.

"Come and take a look Paula. Here's our church budget. Take a look and see how stretched our finances are," he said.

Paula was impatient. She didn't want to have another conversation about church finances. She said nothing.

"I know you don't like me giving you a reality check," he continued, "but as a member of the Church Council I have a duty to point out that we need money for some urgent renovations to the building. We need the money to buy a new computer. How do you think we are going to find the money when we have to keep financing projects like the one you run?"

Paula's patience was wearing thin. "And which one of you Council members have ever bothered to come and talk to these people who are struggling to live?" she retorted.

"Don't sound so righteous Paula. You know that I came as a migrant and had it tough till the Andersons supported me till I got a job. They were churchgoers, but they never pushed religion down my throat, did they? Perhaps..."

"Perhaps more of us should listen to real stories from real people in the real world and stop thinking about sticks and stones and budgets," Paula shouted as she walked away leaving Anil to his church council budget.

Pause and reflect on the story.

What intentions colour our conversations with those in the 'real world' who don't profess to be Christian?

Do we sometimes substitute 'good works' for faith and witness?

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