

Perspective

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uniting church
Canberra Region
Presbytery

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Future issues of *Perspective*

We plan to have a congregational focus and a Presbytery profile in future issues. Please feel free to submit reflections and stories that will help us know each other a little better and reveal something of what God is doing in our midst. *Ed.*

Perspective Q and A

- *How often do you publish Perspective and in what quantity?*
1700 copies quarterly
- *Who is responsible for collating the information content?*
Presbytery Ministers, Kevin Dilks and Geoff Wellington request articles from those who will be giving presentations at the next Presbytery meeting. Carolyn McAllister edits, lays out and prepares for printing.
- *What is the cost to Canberra Presbytery?*
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- *How is the document funded?*
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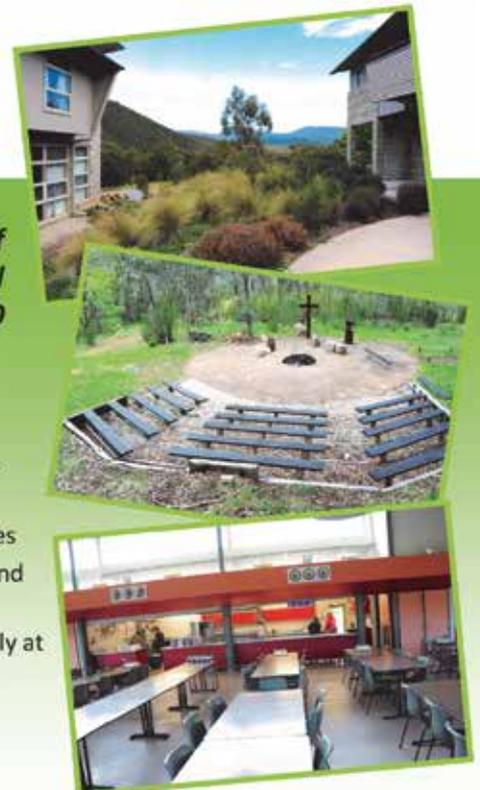
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More marks of the movement

Synod - my experience

“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

On the first day Aboriginal theology was mentioned.

On the second day an Aboriginal man said to those gathered, “Don’t walk on eggshells around us. Ask the questions and we will tell you”.

Later that day I asked a woman, an elder who keeps the law, to explain Aboriginal theology and we began a conversation which I hope will continue.

On the third day I joined a group to discuss the need to give time and space to hear the wisdom of our First Peoples. In this group of 16 people, with respect and great trust, three elders, two women and a man, shared some of their theology.

“When God gave the law to Moses, He gave it to the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have always known about God through the Dreaming but wondered, ‘Who is the little boy?’ in the story. It was Jesus. The white people brought the gospel and we are very happy about that.

“Some Aboriginal people find it hard to accept Jesus because the white man brought the gospel in a pot plant. When the white man took the plant out of the pot and put it in the land, it became one with the people, the gospel became part of the Dreaming.”

Other things I learnt:

- Fundamental to relationship is respect. No matter who a person is or what they have done, there is always a measure of respect shown.
- Trust is vital, First People just want to be treated equally.
- The UCA was the only church to invite the First Peoples in and for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the Uniting Church is something special and beautiful.

To the First Peoples of this Presbytery, we ask you to forgive the Second People for all that happened when the first boats arrived to appropriate your land and for all the injustice since that time. It would take the love described in the book of Corinthians to forgive these atrocities but I know that you live that love every day.

- Common Ground is where the First and Second Peoples come together and there is a need to use the special senses of the Body of Christ.
- Dialogue is essential to see Christ in each other.
- Australia is big enough for all of us. First peoples are generous, welcoming and aching to tell their story.
- First Peoples are the big brothers and sisters of this land and they want to come alongside to share and welcome people in.
- First Peoples listen and learn a lot because within there is wisdom, knowledge and patience. They are very observant people.
- Second People need to slow down and imagine sitting under a tree to hear the story.
- Second People need to make time to create the space for sharing. The relationship needs balance. It is about what we can give each other, not what you can give us. Talk of money is a barrier.
- There is belief we will stand as one people in God and come together as one church and claim this land for God.

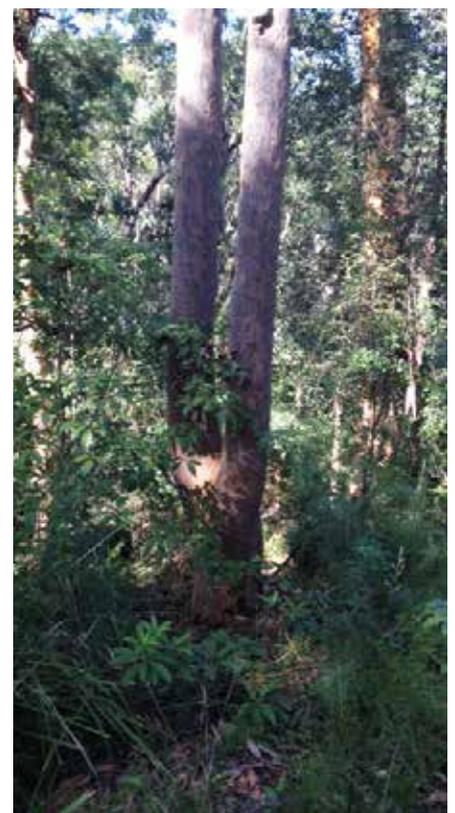
Two days after Synod I found some bush and I sat down, looked and waited and then I saw. A strong tree with a thick trunk which divided in two about half a metre above the ground. Each of the two trunks were the same width and health although one, with some damaged branches, had grown up at a bit of an angle to accommodate the other. Same ground, same root, same tree.

Since returning home I have tried to distill what I learnt from the elders. I found it in

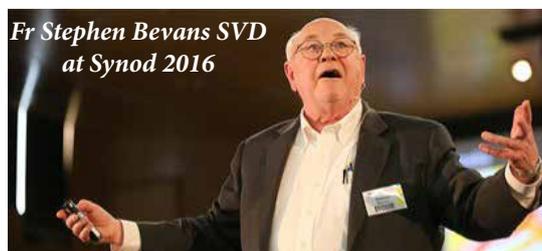
I Corinthians 13: 4-7.

As you know, it is the vision of this Presbytery to become a movement of the Holy Spirit, not just be an institution. If we can find Common Ground and embrace the love of our Congress family I believe it would help us on our way.

Vanessa Crimmins
Presbytery Chairperson



Do you want to dance?



Fr. Stephen Bevans SVD (Societas Verbi Divini - Society of the Divine Word) led one of the bible study times at Synod 2016 and posed the question; “God is a verb: so do you want to dance?”

“Do you want to dance? Do you want to join in that great Conga Line that has moved through the world since the beginning of time and which is also the heartbeat of God’s deepest self?

“The dance will go on without us. It does not need us to continue its joyful progress among all peoples and in all times. But if we do join, we won’t regret it. As we dance to bring wholeness and healing and peace in the world, we ourselves will become whole, be healed, and be graced with peace.

“Even if we don’t join in the dance, we will be its beneficiaries. But the dance goes on, the movement which is God continues to move, God continues—joyfully, indefatigably—to be in mission. The dance has dancers, the verb has subjects, the Mission has a church”.

The image of dancing seems to me to be a helpful one as together congregations and presbytery consider how to live between “movement and institution”. Dancing by its nature is both unconstrained and yet conforms to patterns of activity. If the church understands God as “verb”, the God who actively seeks the wholeness, healing and peace of the whole creation, then by definition the invitation to the church to come and join the dance of movement is to understand itself as “movement” rather than institution.

The scriptures attest to other times, people and places as movement. You might like to consider the Jewish Synagogue, the central place, perhaps even the institutional place, yet the space in which commerce, social and religious life took place. A melting pot of ideas, learning and meaning took shape as people came together to make sense of the world they were encountering.

The Synagogue is the place in Jewish history that holds together movement and institution, the space that enters the dance and rhythm of life. When I try to imagine what our church buildings might look like in the future I dream they might one day look more like this.

A group of women (Beguines) and men (Beghards) emerged outside of the Convents (institutions of the day) around the late 1100’s. They were lay people, mostly single women, but men also who lived together, practised simplicity of life, prayed the “hours” and served the community they lived in.

They were perhaps the first “base community” in the new urban environment. They operated outside the official channels and male priestly domination to practice life as “they fed the hungry, clothed the poor, visited the sick, educated girls, offered hospitality, established homes for widows, nursed lepers and cared for the dying”.

This group of laywomen and men was a movement that found its own institutional structure and understood what God’s mission looked like in their context. Perhaps our congregations can imagine themselves like this movement actively joining in God’s mission in practical ways.

John Wesley emerged as a Christian leader at the time of the industrial revolution in England. The industrial revolution brought much to society but also had its negative effects, particularly to the group of people referred to as the “working class”.

John was an Anglican priest who had no intention of establishing another institution but that is what emerged eventually. The movement that started as a derisive term “methodists” sought to educate the poor (Sunday School), create places of belonging and accountability of life practice (The class meeting). The Methodists met in “classes” of 11 members and a leader in private homes each week. They prayed together, they read the bible together, discussed their spiritual lives together and collected money for works of “charity” together.

Called and sent

At its heart the Methodist movement had a strong sense of call to being built up as disciples of Jesus Christ and they achieved that through regular study, prayer and attention to spiritual practice. They also had a strong sense of being a sent community that understood that how you lived and practised your life was important. Practical help alongside people who were hurting and disadvantaged was part of being a disciple of Christ.

The Methodists organised themselves into “Societies” (a group of classes) and into “circuits” (a number of societies) under the leadership of a “superintendent”; a resource minister really who gave “oversight” and support to the leaders of the societies, rather than “doing” it all for them.

It would seem that the Uniting Church is once again exploring this model of ministry to encourage the movement of disciples of Jesus on the ground where the invitation to join God’s Conga line dance is at hand.

Do you want to dance?

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geoff Wellington".

Geoff Wellington
Presbytery Minister (Mission and Education)



More marks of the movement

When God helps us

Way back in 1990 Kennon Callahan in his book, *Effective Church Leadership*, wrote:

“Be at peace. The current decline and demise of the mainline denominations IS GOD’S WAY OF HELPING.” (My emphasis).

How do you feel when you read those words?

I grew up in a Methodist congregation, part of a large denomination known, amongst other things, for its concern for the poor. We were not arrogant about it. We were generous in our giving to people in our own country, and throughout the world, who needed help. We were a church **FOR** the poor.

As time went on I recall times when our church, as an institution, started to ask, “If we are effective in our help of the poor why are the poor not present in our congregations?”

This question led us to pray that God would make us a church **OF** the poor.

I wonder if God is now answering our prayer by making us a church **THAT IS** poor.

Venturing into Exodus

To be part of a movement is not to have enough resources; not to be clear as to what the future looks like; not to be confident that you have all the answers. To be part of a movement is to live with uncertainty; to hold lightly to things of the past; to trust in signs that are not much more than a cloud in the sky by day and a fire in the sky by night. (Exodus 13:21,22)

At the time of writing this article my mind is also on the sermon I will be preaching this coming Sunday. I have been asked to preach on the part of the story of Exodus where God provides the Hebrews with manna and quails in response to their complaints to Moses that he had brought them “into the desert to starve us all to death.” (Exodus 16:3)

So, I am reading again the whole Exodus story and as I do so, I am reminded how difficult it is to leave behind even that from which we may want to be delivered – “I have heard them (my people) cry out to be rescued ... so I have come down to rescue them ...” (Exodus 3:3,4)

To be part of a well resourced and solidly established institution is far more comfortable and peaceful than a movement in which the things with which we are familiar are no longer present in the same ways.

But this seems to be God’s way with us – to take us out of comfortableness and certainty and lead us into a desert where we are uncomfortable and in which we are uncertain.

This, then, is why we are asking our Presbytery to focus so much on the idea of movement:

- because we realise we are in an era where what we once knew about being church no longer fully works;
- because we realise that God has brought our churches into an experience, an era, that is not unlike venturing into Exodus;
- because we know that this new era into which God has placed us asks much of us;
- because we need constant reminders that discomfort and uncertainty do not mean God has left us;
- because we want our Presbytery, Congregations and Members to be faithful to their calling in Christ – to be the church for/of today not only the church of yesterday, even though it may cost us much;
- because we want to keep encouraging our Church to follow Christ, even if it is into the desert.

Hope in the desert

The order and peacefulness of the church in which I grew up is gone. There are just enough of us left, who remember how it once was. Just enough to be a voice of hope that the church we knew might rise again from the ashes. I believe this hope is misplaced. Our hope is not in what once happened in the past. Rather, our hope is in the call of God in Christ to be the church of the present, a church that gives birth to something new into the future.

And as we all travel in this Movement perhaps we can be helped by the little list of rules I have constantly shared with my daughters, at times with my tongue firmly in my cheek but always with an element of seriousness:

It always:

- takes longer than we thought;
- is harder than we thought;
- costs more than we thought;
- turns out to be different than we thought;
- ends up being more fulfilling than we could ever have imagined.

Kevin Dilks
Presbytery Minister (Pastoral and Administration)

For such a time as this - call to prayer

Collect your free copy of this Presbytery booklet of reflections which calls us to pray about family violence. More about this and the ecumenical event on 18 June 2016 is on our website: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/2016/for-such-a-time-as-this-booklet-is-a-call-to-prayer/





Marking the movement

*Some reflections
on the desire to be part of a movement
as well as an institution.*



Hugh Bourne

The Canberra Region Presbytery is being encouraged to think of itself not only as an Institution but also as a Movement. This was quite explicit in the recent Presbytery Meeting in February, and the Regional Meeting in Bega in March. A few days before the Regional Meeting a friend had sent me some articles on the Primitive Methodists, and I was struck by the tension between the Primitive Methodists and the Wesleyans; between Movement and Institution, as I interpreted it.

I was struck by the fact that Wesley had died in 1791; and yet by 1807 when the first 'Camp Meeting' was held at Mow Cop in Staffordshire, there were people within Methodism convinced the movement had lost its way and needed to return to its roots. This was the meaning behind the word 'Primitive'. In fact by 1811 there were enough people so convinced that, under the leadership of two charismatic evangelists **Hugh Bourne** and **William Clowes**, the new group was born and spread rapidly. As the Church of England had closed its doors to Wesley and early Methodism, so the Wesleyans closed their doors to the Primitives.

It can be argued there were good reasons for the Wesleyans withdrawing into institutional boundaries, such as the revolution in France which unsettled Europe and made loyalty to the Crown a high priority in England. Street preaching and outspoken evangelists were a particular threat. But I think the matter goes much deeper than this, into our very nature as human beings.

We live between the need to be contained and the need to transcend; to feel secure and to feel free; between conserves and spontaneity; Word and Spirit. Too much containment, and freedom goes out the window; ecclesiastical authority is born and spontaneity dies. Too much spontaneity, untempered by love and wisdom and good leadership, and chaos and anarchy can reign.

Leadership under a visitation of the Spirit is critical; leadership that can encourage when required, and contain when required; but the Spirit is not to be quenched.

Just as the original movement Wesley had begun was a time of the Spirit, managed in the main by his personality and wisdom, so also was the rise of Primitives.

Authority belonged to the Spirit primarily, not the ecclesiastical system. People preached on the streets, engaged the poor and lost and lonely, not because of any institutional vision but because they felt moved to do so. It was in the air. And they believed it was God who was moving them.

And as the Wesleyans succumbed to the conserve of the ecclesia, so also did the Primitives eventually. So had the early Church. I believe Christ began a Spiritual Movement that became a Religious Institution.

At the heart of the matter was the question of authority. Under the Spirit the focus was on Christ the crucified village carpenter, filled with the Spirit and risen from the dead; under the Institution the focus was on Christ the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity and the gatherings became liturgies, microcosms of the Universe affirming the ecclesiastical authority of the clergy which was more often than not exercised politically not spiritually.

Many of the early Primitive preachers and leaders were young men and women, quite unqualified in ecclesiastical or political terms.

They abided by three **Marks of the Movement** they were part of and were committed:

- to personal prayer;
- to meet regularly for group prayer;
- to attend a weekly study group.

Is this where we might start in our present day call for Movement to enliven Institution, for the dynamic village carpenter to make real in everyday life the claims of eternal deity for ordinary people like us to see and believe?

David Oliphant
Bodalla Congregation



When the last Minister leaves

Most of us have grown up in churches in which the bulk of the ministry was provided by ordained ministers.

For many congregations that is no longer an option; we simply cannot afford it. Our people are ageing and our incomes are dwindling. The prospect of life without benefit of clergy can be forbidding, but biblical metaphors about sheep do not mean we need be reduced to helpless bleating. Our plight can be a catalyst for change and, if we take the priesthood of all believers seriously, we may begin to see ministry, not as a role to be delegated, but as a call to us all.

The Mt Dromedary Parish has adopted a model suggested by the Rev Dr David Oliphant who realised that, despite the presence of two retired ministers and some lay leaders, inevitably we would find it difficult to meet the ministry needs of our four churches when he retired. Ministry teams of three or four lay people now serve each congregation with limited assistance from ministers. The leaders meet periodically to discuss common problems and sort out preaching rosters, but each team remains substantially autonomous. This model has now been operating for two years, albeit until recently under David's watchful eye. It is generally working well.

Of course, we do not claim to have overcome every problem. Some people still seem to feel that there can be no substitute for a 'real' minister. The burden of responsibility may also fall more heavily on some people due to factors such as age, ill health, lack of experience and perhaps fear of being unable to cope with the demands. It may be possible to teach old dogs new tricks, but it is not always possible to stop them becoming exhausted.

We need to find others to share the load. This may not be easy, but people are often more capable than they realise and if they step out in faith, even on shaky legs, they may find themselves doing surprisingly well. But our expectations may also have to change if we are to be open to God speaking to us through people without theological training, and that may require us to ask some searching questions.

What is the church? We may agree that it is not our institutions or buildings but our people who are the body of Christ, but many of us still seem to believe that the essential manifestation of the church is to be found in our Sunday services and that other activities are less important.

Yet Jesus promised to be with us whenever two or three are gathered together in his name. So is he not equally present in our bible studies, craft groups, barbecues and outreach activities? The great commission is to make disciples, not to fill pews, and God moves in the hearts of people in many contexts. Of course, most of us feel the need to meet together for prayer, praise and reflection on the great truths of our faith, but what truly matters is the quality of our relationships with God and with each other.

Can we meet less formally? We may be comfortable with familiar routines, but our orders of service are not engraved in stone tablets. We can make changes.

In our little church at Bodalla the seats are arranged in a circular pattern. This initially raised some eyebrows, but we could not imagine Jesus requiring his disciples to sit in three serried rows rather than gathering round him, and we have found that sitting as a group of friends rather than an audience has led to a greater sense of inclusion. We also embrace any music likely to move our hearts toward God and if we have no musicians we can still sing.

What about preaching? Few people leaving 'fellowship' or 'prayer and praise' services complain of inconsolable distress due to the absence of sermons. The word of God can be expounded many ways and speaking in church can seem less intimidating, if we make it clear that an informal talk or discussion will be sufficient. It is the Holy Spirit who brings conviction. We need only speak with authenticity. No one will expect soaring oratory and, as one of our members said recently, if there is the odd theological gaffe, it will probably just stimulate some fruitful discussion. The trick is to embrace flexible approaches and identify appropriate people willing to try new things.

How can people be supported? The Presbytery provides some training courses and ministry resources can be found on the internet. It might ultimately be possible to have a regional minister assume pastoral responsibility for ministry teams in several congregations. But one cannot deal with every problem by waiting for the cavalry to come over the hill.

Others in the congregation need to help in whatever way they can and we all need to be faithful in prayer to the One who holds us all securely in His hands.

Ken Crispin, Bodalla Congregation



More marks of the movement

St Ninian's continue to make their mark

The Social Action Group of St Ninian's Uniting Church in Lyneham has a history of organising and hosting public forums that both share information and address identified needs in the community.

On 14 April they again demonstrated their wonderful organisation skills and outstanding hospitality when they hosted the *Living Options for Ageing Canberrans* seminar.

The seminar was promoted broadly across Canberra and whilst they didn't ask for rsvps, a couple of days out, the organisers were expecting 50-60 people.

Well on the day a very committed group of some 10 volunteers (ranging in age from 69-86 and averaging 76) were quite surprised – we counted approximately 90 people sitting in the crowd! Delighted and excited, whilst also feeling a little overwhelmed in the kitchen, they buttered more loaves of bread and joked that it would be a bit of a “loaves and fishes” lunch. They managed it beautifully and everyone had something to eat as well as dessert.

Living Options for Ageing Canberrans was inspired by the table talks on affordable housing that St Ninian's hosted in mid 2015.

In these talks we noted that there was real concern for those in the congregation who were ageing and finding it difficult to manage or be informed about their options for downsizing accommodation – whether that be moving to independent living units or to residential care options.

It seemed quite logical that this was a concern not just within the congregation but also more broadly in the community. It also seemed a manageable need to try to help address. The Social Action Group decided to take this head on, inviting speakers from Council on the Ageing (COTA) and DUO, the ACT Retirement Village Residents' Association and Uniting Ageing services.

Information was presented on housing options, home care packages, the myagedcare.gov.au website, and so forth. Plenty of time was given for participants to ask their own specific questions and seek opportunity for one-on-one assistance.

Below: The Church hall nearly at capacity



... we should look to replicate this event in Canberra's South and surrounds ...



Above: Enjoying lunch in the sunshine.

The seminar highlighted several things:

1. Many ageing people are not on the internet or don't yet know about the myagedcare.gov.au website and contact phone numbers;
2. Myagedcare is now the gateway to accessing subsidised support services;
3. The importance of one-on-one assistance to navigate the options;
4. The benefit of hearing information from your peers – Alistair Christie was quite the salesman for retirement villages!

Congratulations to all those involved in organising and hosting the seminar, with particular mention of Marion McConnell and Judith Shaw.

It was apparent on the day that we should look to replicate this event in Canberra's South and surrounds so if your Church would like to host a seminar this year, please be in touch.

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



More marks of the movement

'Uniting for the Common Good'

today and in the future

During the mid-1990's I was an outreach worker in a small church-based charity in the inner city of Sydney.

At the same time, I spent every spare moment in the Mitchell Library working on an Honours thesis; researching, among other things relating to Australia's political history, how this great nation came to be known as 'The Commonwealth of Australia'.

For the good of the whole

I learnt that the origin of the term "Commonwealth" can be found in the phrase 'the Common Good'.

It's an idea we share in our mission statement as the NSW/ACT Synod - we are 'Uniting for the Common Good'. The phrase comes from the ancient Greek words *symphero* 'to gather', or 'to unite' and *koinos* 'the common, mutual, and public'.

Like the solid foundations of our great country, today our mission of 'Uniting for the Common Good' captures our Church's purpose and place in the Australian community. It echoes St Paul's words in describing a vision of the Early Church that works for the good of the whole: 'Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.' (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Yet I wonder if we have really stopped to think what it means to be people of the Common Good. And with the many social challenges still before us, I wonder if we truly know how we will achieve it?

God's Mission - together

It is clear to me we must work in partnership with our communities. We will do this because it has always been how we have worked as a church, reflecting a belief that we are part of God's Mission and must be in the world working with all God's people, people of all creeds or none.

But we must also be committed to working collaboratively. With fewer resources, problems are more complex and creative solutions will always be found by bringing together diverse groups of people. This is a big change for a church that has historically been large enough to work independently of others. This will not cut it in the future. In the past we could talk theologically and in principle about interdependence. Now our very survival is dependent on our ability to live this out.

The metaphor of 'movement' used in the Canberra Region Presbytery reflects this shift very effectively. The emphasis on working together but with more flexibility not only suits the changing church demographics but also the fact that the greatest social reformers were invariably movements.

The way forward

The future of local congregational mission will increasingly be found in leading and organising local communities in areas of local concern and public policy. It will likely be as agents of change and less as service delivery bodies. Recent examples of this are seen through the Community Organising agenda of Sydney Alliance and recent workshops with Rich Harwood.

This new way of working will require new forms of shared governance, local cooperation, communication and a belief that our future is in working together, not in creating our own empires. Imagine what we could achieve, for example, if we work towards common objectives mobilising our 20,000 church attendees and Uniting's 9,000 staff and 3,000 volunteers? There's tremendous opportunity but also considerable challenge in finding new ways of our church working together as both institution and movement.

Leaders of movements

All of this has implications for our leaders. We need to develop new types of ministry leaders who are outwardly focused and able to collaborate with others, particularly with those who are culturally, socially or ideologically different to those we have typically found in our pews on a Sunday.

We will need people who can lead loose movements of people that will draw together people from our congregations, our institutions and the wider community. Working with difference can be very difficult and getting something done is even more challenging, but our communities need people who can span boundaries to break the traditional impasses in our society and politics.

Uniting for the Common Good is a powerful vision for our church and community. We need to recalibrate how we work as a church to ensure we make it a reality.

Doug Taylor, Director of Strategic Engagement at Uniting

Our call for a re-think on drugs

In 2015, the **Presbytery Social Justice Group** chose drug law reform as its highest priority advocacy issue. At the April Synod Meeting, their well-informed proposals were supported, with Synod giving the go-ahead for congregations to call for:

- Increased investment in harm reduction and demand reduction strategies, and
- Further measures to decriminalise individual possession of small amounts of illegal drugs (not to decriminalise the illegal supply of drugs).

The full article is online at canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/2016/re-think-on-drugs/



Clinging to the cliff top



We don't often get a chance to peek into each other's gardens but I am privileged to be able to visit so many churches in our Presbytery because of my travels with the Chaplaincy.

It is a great eye opener to congregational energy and I have learned a lot of lessons about how to make people feel welcome ... or not.

Is it my imagination or has there been a dropping away of resentment towards what I heard referred to as C and E people - people we only see at Christmas and Easter? It's always been puzzling intolerance to me because I love to look up and see a sea of strangers bringing their children.

To me, it's been like seeing fingers clutching the window sill or cliff edge, any minute they could fall off but their desire is to stay connected - somehow. So they cling to festivals such as Easter and Christmas which give them permission (and time) to worship. I see it as a sign of hope - of wanting their children to have some identity and share in a belonging. It reminds me of the magpies who bring their offspring to introduce them to the humans of the household.

I hear the desperate cry for connectedness with faith every day in the chaplaincy. When the combined faith groups marched into the **Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees**, the roar from the crowd was deafening. It brought tears to my eyes. People want us to be strong, to lead the way and to provide a moral foundation to society. They just don't want to go to church - not in the way we're used to.

I've walked around for several months with Kevin Dilks' words echoing in my head: *...an institution values good ordering of its structures and stability; a movement values inspiration, flexibility and transformation.* I've been toying with how this fits into my interaction with faith people in the church and outside... and so here are a few comments and wild imaginings.

First I think it's right. We value our structure (both rules and buildings) a great deal. I thank all those people who donate their valuable time to making things happen and ensuring things run smoothly - what a wonderful gift to the worship of God. But there is another side.

Our buildings are also barriers and it takes courage to enter in. Twice in my life, I have passed through that small portal and someone in a congregation has looked up, seen a stranger and patted the seat beside them, taking responsibility to lead me through the service traditions; the parts everyone knows about except the visitors. Sadly, neither of these welcoming experiences were in Australia.

Getting the inside out

You would know that many Pacific churches don't have walls. On Sunday, the church and the community blend into one. The hymns are heard all over town and even standing outside a stranger is touched by harmonies. So in idle moments, I wonder - how do we get the inside out? Not drag them in but bring us out. Here are a few wonderful examples from across our Presbytery:

- **towns that have stations-of-the-cross walk(s)**, taking communities inside and on the grounds of every church;
- **the church that put a bench out the front**, encouraging passers-by to stop, engage in conversation, or be still;
- **the young adult group that meets and can ask anything**; getting deep, honest discussion.
- **churches that take church into other communities** like setting up a table at the Canberra SpringOUT Pride Festival.; not as recruitment centres, but open doors - opportunities for honest questions and connectedness.
- **finally there's Grace Community** and the many ways Goulburn has reimagined 'church'.

Looking elsewhere, there's a Minister in Manly who reopened a closed church on Friday nights. People come off the ferry and rest their souls in candlelight and silence; companionship and acceptance. The place is almost full! There's the Queensland community that were given a tent. They set it up on a bit of grass in the middle of town and you know what? People came to pray. They loved the tent because they were not constricted by walls or days or times - they could just show up!

Opportunities outside the structure? Can we throw an obligation free rope to those who are dangling from the cliff top? In my own small world, I have always wanted a glass office in the hospital lobby with a neon sign above simply saying 'the chaplain is in'. Early church didn't have buildings - they had breakfast!

I dream of pop-up churches in shipping containers like coffee carts at parks and markets. Instead of standing with a sandwich board offering free hugs, why don't we set up free water and prayer stations? I'm sure every church could have a prayer wall or box on the street with a sign 'put down your load' or 'leave your troubles here'.

I think as marks of a movement - we need more imagination. I don't mean stop worshipping in our traditional ways; just add to them endlessly. For I believe, like the fish Simon Peter hauled aboard, though there may be many ways, the net will not be torn. (John 21:11)

Jean Shannon, Hospital Chaplaincy

For resources and ways to help hospital chaplaincy, go to: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/hospital-chaplaincy/

Dan Riethmuller



It is a joy and an honour to be the pastor at Bega Tathra Uniting Church.

My family moved to the Sapphire Coast from Wollongong in June last year and the church has been generous, welcoming and warm. My wife, Annaleise, is an academic in childhood motor skill development and our two boys love to read, laugh and wrestle.

Bega Tathra UC has a great reputation in Sydney and Wollongong (where many school leavers go for university), so I had pretty high expectations of the church community—expectations which have been well and truly met.

Our church has a long history of evangelical ministry and Christ-centred preaching. Many from Bega Tathra have been trained in ministry, serving in churches, on the mission field and in work places. The ministers serving alongside have been committed to the centrality of the gospel of Christ found in the Scriptures.

Yet it is the commitment of the congregation that is such an encouragement to me. Were I to drop dead tomorrow, I know that there would still be two Sunday church services with great sermons from people in the congregation, bible studies and youth group would continue, the Op shop would be staffed, scripture would be taught and people would visit the nursing homes.

It is a beautiful picture of the priesthood of all believers.

I was previously on the pastoral staff at Wollongong Baptist Church after completing studies at Sydney Missionary and Bible College (SMBC), an interdenominational bible college that was a real boon to my growth. Studying theology in a community is a special pleasure. My thinking was challenged and refined and I left SMBC more excited by the genius and glory of God. In sending Jesus as the culmination of salvation history, as the Creator who saves his creation through the death and resurrection of Christ, God has amazed me with his love, power and brilliance.

I became a Christian as a teenager as I came to understand God's grace to me in sending Jesus. I have never got over the shock of the gospel – that Christ would die on my behalf and now reigns as the risen king – that stuff is mind-blowing. What a privilege it is to proclaim those truths! To be the recipients of the gospel of the bible, united to Christ and his church, telling others about the good news; I can think of no better thing to invest my life in.

Again and again I find myself agreeing with John Wesley who writes, "I want the whole Christ for my Saviour, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship and the whole world for my mission field."

Soli Deo gloria.

Dan Riethmuller - Bega Tathra Uniting Church

More marks of the movement

prison ministry

Canberra City
&
St Columba's

Prison ministry by Canberra City Church supported by St Columba's meets the Uniting Church's ministry commitments to the male inmates at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) in the ACT.

The ministry visits are ably coordinated by the Chaplain, Reverend Peta Thorpe, and are led by lay members Richard Scott and Harold Wotherspoon who offer a short service to the inmates.

Richard and Harold visit the AMC on three successive Sundays, calling on the Remand, Sentenced and Special blocks. The numbers of inmates attending the services continues to increase, with nearly forty attending a recent visit. The Chaplain commented this was the highest number of any denomination in recent memory.

Visits to Women There have been no visits to the women inmates section as these fall on a Friday and Richard is at work. Although visitors are limited to three people, Richard is increasing the number of Uniting Church members who are able to attend, with Penaia Verebalavu of City Uniting and George and Joan Pratt of South Woden Uniting participating in the required checks and training.

Joshua Kakundi, an international ANU student who attends City Uniting, is attending training in May. Richard is hopeful that the Uniting Church's women's visits may be met.

Participation The visits are a rewarding experience and the attending inmates participate in the service. They are from all sections of society and are interesting people. Some are sad and they are keen for prayers to be said.

A memorable day is the visit on ANZAC when Richard as a serving Australian Defence Force member attends in uniform and speaks at a commemorative service. The inmates react well and participate in the correct spirit.

Kairos Prison Ministry Richard also supports Kairos Prison Ministry in AMC where a Kairos weekend was held recently. Kairos is an interdenominational Christian ministry reaching out to incarcerated individuals, their families and those who work with them, to bring meaning and hope in the place of loneliness, isolation and despair. There is more information on the website kairos.org.au.

Prayer support for the inmates, the prison ministry and Kairos would be appreciated.

Richard Scott, Canberra City Uniting Church.

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