

Perspective

Volume 19 Issue 89 Winter 2013

COVENANT

*Marriage
Partnership
Membership*



**Uniting Church in Australia
Canberra Region Presbytery**



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The cover image *Pulling together* shows rowers on Lake Burley Griffin in the early morning mist. Photographed by Jenny Smith, Gungahlin Uniting Church.

Page 9 image *Making a wedding ring*: iStockPhoto Yurilux.

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The Covenanters

Presbytery Minister Duncan Macleod reflects on the themes of covenant, partnership, membership and marriage covered in this issue of Perspective.

Over the first weekend of August I attended a gathering of the Uniting and Anglican congregations who in 2010 covenanted together to be the Snowy Mountains Church. We explored the connection between the marriage covenant and the agreement they had made to work together in mission. Our conversation included ongoing issues about sharing property, finances, staff time and styles of worship. However there was a strong commitment to continue as partners, honouring the covenant that had been signed in 2010.

Covenant is the English translation of “berit”, one of the central concepts in the Hebrew scriptures. Covenants were formed between nations, between kings or local rulers and their people, and were the heart of marriage partnerships. God’s relationship with Abraham and his descendants was expressed in a series of covenants.

Semitic communities marked the serious and binding nature of the covenant in ceremonies including promises, written records, animal sacrifices and covenant meals attended by covenant partners and witnesses.

This issue is focused on covenantal relationships.

Sarah Bachelard reminds us that God is the one who forms us and calls us into relationship. It’s not all about us!

Mark Faulkner reminds us that partnership in the mission of Jesus is outward looking and open to the contributions of people who have not signed up or turned up for worship.



Duncan Macleod (in red) with snow chaplains Lloyd Bennett, Graham Morrison and Owen Davies outside the cross-denominational Perisher Alpine Chapel in Kosciuszko National Park

Membership is as much about witness and service as it is about worship.

Queanbeyan Uniting Church and UnitingCare NSW.ACT have just launched Healthy Living for Seniors. Like the churches in the Snowy Mountains, this partnership will involve a lot of adjustment.

Tim Winslade writes about his research into partnership with local sports communities, challenging us to find out what God might be doing on the sports fields and clubs on Sunday mornings.

Ivan Roberts tells the story of a young couple who embody the covenant partnership being explored in the conversation on theology of marriage in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Jean Shannon explores the promises she makes in her daily covenant with the people she works with in hospitals.

Jonathan Barker writes about practical ways used to strengthen congregations who have agreed to worked together.

Stuart Anderson at Kippax UnitingCare unpacks a partnership that has led to a stronger relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Belconnen.

Noel Smart tells the story of a little church in Bodalla pulling together with the community.

Jess Yoon and Moses Millinyu, working with tertiary students on behalf of Canberra City Church, invite us into their partnership.

I’m looking forward to hearing more of these stories of partnership in the days to come!

**Duncan Macleod
Presbytery Minister**

When God takes the initiative



Image by Brian Rope

When I was growing up, I spent a lot of time trying to make a relationship with God ‘happen’.

I longed to experience God, I yearned for God’s peace and the assurance of God’s presence. I sought to nurture or at least generate this relationship through prayer and service, theological and biblical study, and fellowship in a Christian community.

But, somehow, it never really worked. It was like one of those relationships where it feels as though you are making all the effort, and the other person is distant and playing hard-to-get.

I tried and tried, but although there were moments of ‘closeness’, it was not enough. I never reached the place of real belonging and friendship – and finally, I gave up. God, it seemed to me, just wasn’t there to have a relationship with.

To tell how I got from there to here is a long story! In essence, though, giving up ‘trying’ was the key. As long as I was seeking to generate my relationship with God, it was all about what I did. ‘God’ was a function of my own needs and imagination; at some level expected to show up on my terms.

When at last I encountered the living God, it was because God (cleverly disguised as my life) had brought me to the place of emptiness and no expectation, the place of true listening, receptivity and wonder. This turns out to be utterly consistent with the biblical witness. The initiative is with God, and God is never quite what we expect. This can be seen in all the covenants God makes with his people – with Noah and Abraham, Moses and David. God approaches them, calls them, commissions and promises them.

It can be seen, above all, in the new covenant made with all of us through Christ. God’s own Son has sought us out and invited us to share in the communion of divine life. That is why, although it is natural for us to ask ‘how do we nurture our relationship with God?’, I think it might be better to wonder, ‘how do we nurture God’s relationship with us?’ That is, how do we become more able to receive what God is giving, to hear the call and promise that God is?

For me, the practice of silent, contemplative prayer is necessarily part of responding to this question. In meditation, we empty ourselves of our thoughts and agenda. We seek simply to be present, waiting on God without fixed expectation, embodying the receptive and humble stance of God’s faithful hearers throughout history: ‘Here am I’.

And wonderfully, though how we do not know, through this practice of Christian meditation we find ourselves drawn more fully into communion with God, with others and ourselves, deeply nourished and renewed. We are nurtured in our relationship with God by God’s own life, to which we are becoming more open and entrusting ourselves more completely.

Sarah Bachelard, Canberra City UC

Rev. Sarah Bachelard leads Benedictus Contemplative Church, an ecumenical worshipping community with a practice of Christian meditation at its heart. We meet on Saturday evenings 6.00 – 7.00pm in the Holy Covenant Anglican Church, Cook. www.benedictus.com.au

Canberra Quiet Days

Canberra Region Presbytery is hosting three one-day retreats designed for Uniting Church members, in August, October and November.

Held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton, and led by Sue Dunbar from Barnabas Ministries, the “Quiet Days” provide space and time for prayerful reflection and attentiveness to God’s Spirit in our lives in company with others who share the same intention.

“Quiet Days” allow for rest, refreshment and new insights.

Each day is 10 am to 4 pm, costs \$50 and includes lunch. You can pay on the day.

Saturday 17 August
“Roots and Wings”

Saturday 26 October
“Spring Renewal”

Saturday 23 November
“Advent Preparedness”

Register your interest at the Canberra Region Presbytery Office. [office\[at\]canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au](mailto:office[at]canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au) T6248 9311.

How can we help?

Covenant as partnership in Queanbeyan

When Queanbeyan City Council relinquished funding for local community aged services, many members of the Queanbeyan Uniting Church wondered how they could help.

Following an approach to the church by UnitingCare Ageing, the concept of 'Healthy Living for Seniors Queanbeyan' came into being.

A tender was submitted to deliver a range of services to the Queanbeyan community through 'Healthy Living for Seniors' and was accepted. To manage the transition, an experienced Transition Leadership Team on site was established along with a Transition Advisory Group convened

by UnitingCare Ageing staff. The Advisory Group included congregation members at Queanbeyan and client, carer and Council representatives.

Steve Coster, minister at Queanbeyan Uniting Church and Pauline Armour, UnitingCare Ageing Director, Community Care report:

Steve: "Working with both the Transition Team and the Transition Advisory Group has been a great example of how UnitingCare Ageing and the Queanbeyan Uniting Church can accomplish much together."

Pauline: "Queanbeyan Uniting Church support is integral to UnitingCare Ageing's ability to provide these valuable services within the local community."

Having the services based in the Queanbeyan Uniting Church premises enables UnitingCare Ageing to further its mission through partnership in the delivery of support, volunteer work, Pastoral Care and links to the Congregation's activities."

The Mirinjani Village Chaplain, **Neil Millar**, presented at a Transition Advisory Group meeting and will be working with Steve to develop pastoral care links with clients and carers.

On 3 July, the Queanbeyan congregation held a welcome afternoon tea for staff, volunteers and congregation members to celebrate the beginning of 'Healthy Living for Seniors Queanbeyan'.

*Pauline Armour, UnitingCare Ageing
Director, Community Care*



Healthy Living for Seniors

This is an approach based on working with each person to understand the lifestyle they want and to provide information, care and support to improve health and wellbeing, enable social participation, and improve functional independence and quality of life. Services provided are:

- Social activities and individual support to assist people to participate in community life
- Day programs to assist people improve health, social engagement and independent living, meeting at the Queanbeyan Uniting Church.
- Respite care to assist Carers supporting an older person and people living with a disability to live in their home and community
- In-home support for people with high support needs who use a number of support services.

Enquiries: 1800 486 484 for information and connection to local staff.

Local, Flexible Learning Communities

Living Our Values



Kevin Dilks (above) and Duncan Macleod (right) will be leading a 2-day seminar at City Church, 69 Northbourne Ave, Canberra, Saturday and Sunday, September 14 and 15.

This two day course explores what it means to be a member of the Uniting Church in Australia. We look at some of the key documents produced by our church, explore where we came from and where we're going.

- The original vision held for our future in the Basis of Union,
- What our core values are, Power as shared influence, and its impact on relationships and decision making
- Councils of the church and their individual functions as well as how they work in relationship together
- Consensus – where it came from,

why we use it as well as how it best works,

- Code of Ethics for Ministry Practice –exploring the very high bar that has been set for leaders, both lay and ordained.



L'Arche and the Disability Network

The Canberra Region Presbytery Disabilities network meets regularly to share insights on ministry with people with disability. The group organised the "Dinner with Dougie" event and Presbytery workshops on disability in May. To join in with the conversation contact Neil Johnston, email [margneil\[at\]bigpond.net.au](mailto:margneil[at]bigpond.net.au)

L'Arche Genesaret Canberra is pleased to be represented by Tarlie Alcock of Canberra Central Parish on the Disability Network.

L'Arche is working to determine the implications of the introduction of the NDIS (DisabilityCare) upon its operations and philosophy of service provision.

L'Arche has launched "100 Friends of L'Arche", a fundraising initiative providing an opportunity for individuals and businesses to pledge \$250 a year or more for 3 years. Official sponsors will be acknowledged at one of L'Arche's public events. If you would like more information about this opportunity please contact Tarlie Alcock, email [jra\[at\]webone.com.au](mailto:jra[at]webone.com.au)



Pre-Christmas Craft Show

Weston Creek Uniting Church
Fri 25th & Sat 26th October

Shop early for Christmas gifts at our 22nd Pre-Christmas Craft Show on Friday 10am-9pm and Saturday 10am-4pm. It's a fabulously colourful and friendly atmosphere for you and your friends.

Entry by gold coin donation.

Devonshire teas, homemade morning and afternoon teas, milk shakes and light lunches.

Official Opening by Ms Kate Shelton, author, artist and owner/manager of Benedict House in Queanbeyan, Friday 7pm, with entertainment by Chain Reaction. A delicious \$5.00 supper will be served afterwards.

All items are for sale. Commission on work sold will assist the Church for its work in the wider community.

Finding connection

Sport and the Spirit

In April this year, Tim Winslade, UCA minister of the Word at Weston Creek in Canberra, graduated with a Doctor of Ministry from Tabor College Adelaide. The difficulties of his journey towards that award were offset by the joy of being able to research a local community soccer club in Canberra, where Tim gained insights he believes are important as the church tries to reorganise itself for mission in the 21st century. Tim continues:

There has been a lot written in recent years about the Church's changing environment as it finds itself on the margins of a society that considers the Church only one of many resources to be called upon to help decipher its problems and future directions.

The Church is no longer central to society; Christendom has long gone and a new mission focus age has arrived.

The trouble is, often we are unsure about how or where to reconnect. Several years ago, I was pondering this question while participating in a competitive over-35's soccer team. I realised that the value of the team environment, the depth of relationships and the experiences of victory and defeat formed a community that in many ways mirrored and at times exceeded the depth of relationships in many local churches. In the club, I was valued as a player, a coach, a friend and a parent. I was part of that community and my occupation meant little, although at times I needed to be a listening ear.

However, the subtle influence of my family on that club community led some people to say on our departure that they were sorry to see us go as the

club had had a better atmosphere over the six years, because of our presence.

The concepts of presence and incarnational mission are the underlying ideas behind the role of the sporting chaplain.

Being present, being available, providing support and encouragement allows the Church to engage in sporting groups who are often struggling with the socialising expectations that are thrust upon them.

My research found parents most often sign up their kids for sporting teams because they want them to learn values and lessons for life that stretch far beyond the sporting field, pitch or pool.

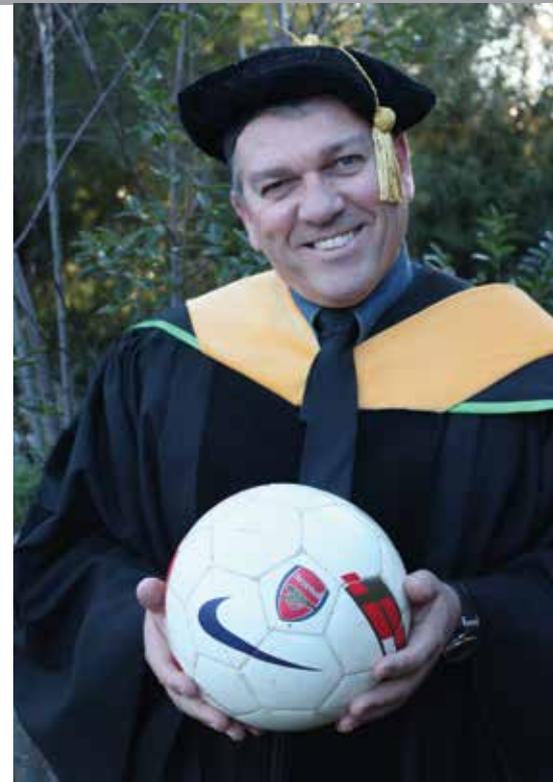
Call for Chaplaincy

Sports Chaplaincy Australia indicates that major sporting organisations across the country are calling on local churches to help provide large numbers of chaplains for junior teams. The success of pilot chaplaincy programs, eg Donald Uniting Church in country Victoria, has been instrumental in opening these doors. Their 'Free Kick' program led them to become a sponsor and active supporter of local junior footy and netball because that's where the children were in their community. So their local sporting community has become the avenue to engage actively and successfully with their community.

Common ground

Whether we like it or not, sport is a major contributor to the Australian culture.

Apart from the professional and elite athletes, two thirds of Australians (including churchgoers) participate in regular organised sporting and fitness activities. So rather than seeing sports as being in competition for our limited leisure time, (especially when



they run on Sunday mornings!!), it is important to see that our interest in sports and leisure activities gives us common ground with people in the wider community as we desire holistic health (spirit, mind and body).

Collaborating and learning

Recognising our common goals helps us to stop competing and start collaborating with community groups who desire our support and input. However, it's not just one way traffic. The enthusiasm, joy, commitment and community that surrounds the reasons for participating in amateur sporting clubs is challenging to the Church, who is often seen to take a much more serious approach to life. That's why I called my thesis, *Redeeming Sports – Traces of the Spirit in a local sports club*. Although we have much to give, God can also teach us a lot through partnering with community groups as we identify how the Spirit is already at work in our communities and join in with God in those places.

Tim Winslade, Weston Creek UC

COVENANT

Is church membership as a covenant relationship 'working'? Are we becoming "an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself"?

Mark Faulkner, minister of the Word at Gungahlin, shares his thoughts and observations.

The simple truth is that most people outside the church think that church is for church people, a club, a place to be 'churchy', and not about the way of following Jesus.

The sad truth is that when new people do come along, they are often seen as resources to do churchy things, rather than people spiritually open to be disciples of Christ.

So... when we come to thinking about 'membership' in the church, I would suggest that we need a significant and dynamic reorientation in our mindsets, both as congregations, and as an institution.

To illustrate this point, you only have to look at the Uniting Church Regulations, to find that the whole first section is on Membership; about who can belong, the different types of belonging, what you have to do to belong, what privileges belonging brings, and how important it is to keep a 'list' of who the members are.

It's amazing that this is the first chapter, the foremost 'rules', in a church that has been trying to talk about change!

What if our understanding of membership was not as legalistic and about the 'club' as it was about being living Christian communities as part of the wider community?

What if our understanding of membership was not as concerned with 'us' and 'them', the 'in' and 'out', and the lists of who falls into which category?



What if our understanding of membership was grounded in the reality of our contemporary world and society?

Centuries ago when Jesus was around, the social and spiritual landscape was not too different from ours in many ways. Religion as an institution was in decline. The Sadducees in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem had become engrossed in materialism and ritual, believing God was contained by their practices. The Pharisees in control of the synagogues had produced a passionless religion based on morals and legalities, thinking this was the way to God. In the midst of suffering and struggle no one really believed in the Greek or Roman pantheon of gods. However, people had not lost interest in the spiritual life and many flocked to hear John the Baptist and Jesus.

As people came to hear Jesus and follow along, I wonder if he was continuously asked how many people he had in his club and if his lists were up to date - often the first question I am asked about our church! I wonder if he was really concerned about getting people 'in', or forwarding them on to the local synagogue so that they could get on to the scripture reading roster!

Isn't it striking that even when people asked to follow, Jesus told them to stay and be in their own communities? (Luke 8: 38ff.) Isn't it striking that the best conversations and faith affirming events in the life of Christ were with outsiders? (eg. Samaritan woman at the well, John 4; Zacchaeus the tax collector, Luke 19; the woman who anointed Jesus, Luke 7.) And...when Jesus does send out the 70 (Luke 10) it wasn't to recruit or convert, but to announce that the Kingdom of God had come near to them.

Now the avid theologians will argue that Baptism is the sign of welcome into the church as the body of Christ. We could reflect however on the Roman Centurion who sent people to Jesus so that his slave might be healed.

To this outsider Jesus responds "... not in all of Israel have I found such faith" - a shocking statement in the face of the religious institution as to who belongs and why.

Perhaps the traditional understanding of "membership" should belong more to sports clubs and gyms than to the church as Christian community. Perhaps those who 'belong' at any time are those in our contact directories, including all ages, races, backgrounds and traditions.

Perhaps those who 'belong' don't attend on Sundays or put their names on our rosters or put money in our offerings but are touched by our life as a Christian community in diverse ways.

As a congregation lives out the simple message: "know this, the Kingdom of God has come near to you." perhaps our covenant of membership is with those who come to us for food, or to sleep in our hall, as much as it is with those whose names are on our rolls.

***Mark Faulkner
Minister
Gungahlin Uniting Church***

marriage
diversity one Body
pulling together one Spirit
membership



Making a wedding ring

Pulling together

Church membership is a covenant decision drawing us together to serve Jesus Christ according to His call upon us as a group. Like marriage, there is a two-way flow of responsibility:

THE INDIVIDUAL “Membership is not seen as a status or privilege but rather as a commission to take responsible action in the life and mission of the church” which is “to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself”... “members are expected to accept the form of the church which the Basis [of Union] describes, which includes, for instance, the discipline of the presbytery and the authority of the Assembly in matters of doctrine.” Becoming a member of the Uniting Church, (NSW/ACT Synod website)

THE CHURCH will “preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church” (Basis of Union 14).

The Uniting Church across Australia is beginning a process of seeking clarity on what it is that makes a marriage in the sight of God. This has arisen because of movements in the secular world to consider broadening our understanding of who is allowed to enter a marriage relationship.

Rather than dive straight into arguments about gay marriage, the Uniting Church has determined the best way to approach this is to start at square one; what do we understand marriage to be? The following opinion piece from Ivan Roberts is offered in the light of this process that we have begun at the Presbytery Meeting 10 August.

Whatever the context, covenants are relational and committed so that both parties – whether organisations or individuals – can engage in safe and creative ways for the well-being of all concerned.

In 2008 two young Canadian women, one studying at UC, sent me an email at City Church indicating they were in a committed relationship but looking for a welcoming church to attend.

Eighteen months later, having endeared themselves to the whole congregation, they returned home to Canada having decided to affirm their relationship before God in marriage.

They invited me and another member of the congregation to provide prayer resources to be used in the service conducted by a minister of the United Church of Canada.

They forwarded their liturgy which included:

Friends, we are gathered together in the presence of God to witness the covenant of marriage of Tara and Stacy. A covenant of marriage is the promise of hope between two people who love each other, who trust that love, and who wish to share the future together.

I realised ‘covenant’ is not a contractual or doctrinal word but a relational quality.

Whatever one’s view on equality of marriage, those who know these two fine young Christian women would never question their commitment or fidelity to one another.

On behalf of our Congregation I sent the following greeting, read during their ceremony:

For a short time your paths intersected with ours in Canberra City Uniting Church.

During that time we came to know each of you in your uniqueness, but also how you each delighted in one another and were free to be yourselves in one another’s company. May that delight continue to be your companion as you continue together your journey through life.

May you enable and celebrate the uniqueness of each other that we came to love and appreciate during your time among us.

Such is life in covenant relationship.

Ivan Roberts
Minister
Canberra City Uniting Church

I promise you

Jean Shannon's commitment as Hospital Chaplain



Image by Brian Rope

I promise you...

... I am the only one around here not interested in your body.

These words could be discouraging or bring relief depending on the circumstances. In a hospital, it is perhaps a relief. Doctors and nurses focus their full attention on your body's functions. Nothing is too embarrassing to poke, prod or question but even in the middle of this unbearable intimacy, the real person (codenamed - the patient) can be ignored or forgotten.

A chaplain's job is to see you – not the body. To actually look into your eyes and be with you, wherever your heart or spirit is at that moment in time.

... acceptance

It means accepting you. You are not a 'cancer patient', 'an older person' or a 'heart attack'. You are a human with skills, experience, gifts, fears, failures; a complex living being, not a title or a disorder – no label at all.

The chaplain waits and slowly you may choose to reveal yourself as a husband, wife, father, mother, professional, carer, doubter or person of strong faith. If you choose to make yourself known, then the pastoral carer will receive you. You are accepted as you are...as God accepts. Come as you are.

... not to judge

It is not the job of the pastoral carer to cheer you up, to barrack for the fight, to question your state of being...it is the job of the chaplain to wait, to listen and to hold and value you as you are, as you make sense of what is happening to you. So we make another promise: not to judge.

... confidentiality

Patients are bombarded with options and information. Often treatments are offered only because they exist. Doctors are trying to be thorough in outlining every possible avenue but in many cases, these are not cures;

simply possibilities offered for both the doctor and the patient to feel like they are doing something, participating – even though the outcomes can be limited. Patients and their families have to wade through all this information and make decisions.

Sometimes, just articulating the options aloud helps patients sort through what they actually want and what they are willing to endure. But they can only do it if they are certain that the listener has no stake in the matter and can keep their confidence.

Confidentiality is the stone upon which this carer/patient relationship is based. It is not collusion but rather a product of trust.

... to let go

Just as diseases progress, people change in the process. As you change and grow through the experience of your illness, often families struggle to accept those changes. They need you to be the person they have always known. The pastoral carer does not nail a person to their mood last week; or their convictions about treatments or any other station or opinion they have passed in this journey. The chaplain can only accept each place as it arrives and let go as the journey progresses.

A pastoral carer gives their time, their heart and the energy of their presence. They bring with them a very simple spiritual comfort. It is usually not dressed up in tradition and is always held in reserve, as needed – like salt and pepper. What they do not share is their own fears, opinions, Christology, problems or health experiences. But rather, as Gilbrán told us, 'The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.' So the last promise of chaplaincy is freedom.

Jean Shannon
Hospital Chaplaincy Leader

Hospital Chaplaincy

Canberra Region Presbytery supports chaplaincy in hospitals in ACT and NSW. Recently UnitingCare and the Presbytery formed a partnership to fund the Chaplaincy full time, with Jean Shannon, Hospital Chaplaincy Leader, continuing to focus on the five hospitals in Canberra. Ministers and volunteers visit hospitals in Canberra, Queanbeyan, Bega, Bateman's Bay, Merimbula, Goulburn, Cooma.

Canberra Hospital Chapel support needed

Jean is supported by a team of volunteers who are always looking for new people to help with presiding, music or keeping patients and visitors company at the services held Thursday morning and afternoon. Teams from **South Woden Uniting Church, St James in Curtin and City Uniting** have rostered to take one or more Thursday afternoon services (a shorter more meditative style of service with no sermon). Would your church be willing to commit to a Thursday 3.30pm service?

See the Hospital Chaplaincy page of our website for more on being a pastoral carer, helping with chapel or Jean's liturgies for use elsewhere. canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au

On a mission

Connecting with tertiary students in Canberra

Moses Millinyu (left) and Jess Yoon (right) have been appointed for six months to work with tertiary students on behalf of Canberra City Church.

Canberra has a number of tertiary education institutions: Australian National University (ANU) in Acton, University of Canberra in Bruce, Australian Catholic University (ACU) in Dickson, Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) in Campbell, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), and Charles Sturt University (CSU) campus at St Mark's Theological College in Barton.

Jess and Moses between them are working with university chaplains Myung Hwa Park and Arto Avakian to strengthen the Uniting Church's ministry on these campuses, particularly ANU and Canberra University.

One goal is to establish Common Ground, an inclusive Christian community group registered as a club with ANU and Canberra University in time for the 2014 academic year.

Contact Moses at 0406 106 550 or Jess at 0414 633 309



3rd Common Dreams Conference

*“Midwives of Change: Progressives
Shaping Religious Communities”*

Manning Clark Centre, Australian National University,
Acton, Canberra

19th-22nd September 2013

To register online & for more information, including other guest speakers and key event times, visit the website at www.commondreams.org.au.

For enquiries call (03) 9571 4575 or email [info\[at\]commondreams.org.au](mailto:info[at]commondreams.org.au)

The 3rd Common Dreams Conference will explore ways that progressive religion, including progressive expressions of other religious traditions besides Christianity, can contribute positively to the common good, so that religion enhances human life rather than diminishes it.

Common Dreams 3 will feature presentations by Professor Marcus Borg, Rev Bruce Sanguin, Rev. David Felten, Dr Val Webb, Dr Margaret Mayman, Dr Greg Jenks, Dr Nigel Leaves, Dr Lorraine Parkinson, Rabbi Aviva Kipen and Prof. Norman Habel.

Common Dreams is an alliance of Australian and New Zealand kindred organisations which promote the study, discussion and implementation of Progressive Christian and other progressive religious streams of thought and action.

Progressive Christianity seeks to understand Christian beliefs and doctrines in the light of modern Biblical historical scholarship and current scientific knowledge, valuing inquiry and intellectual integrity, and open to diversity of opinion.

Covenants Revisited

Partnership in the Southern Highlands

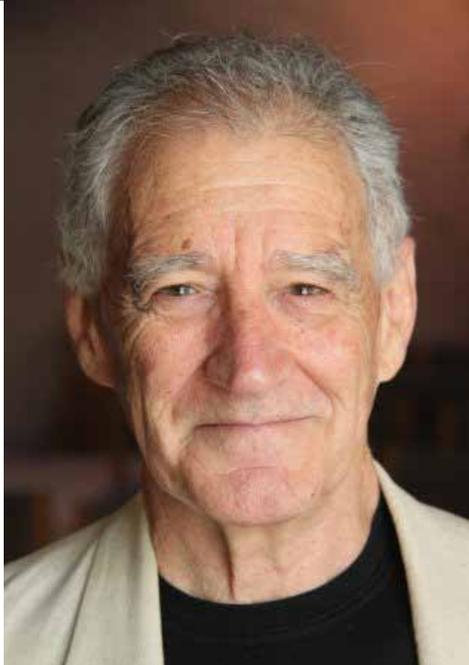
Jonathan Barker has been placed as Interim Intentional Minister with the Goulburn Linked Congregations for 2013. An interim intentional minister works to five tasks: coming to terms with history, dealing with leadership and decision-making concerns, re-thinking linkage with other churches and the denomination, developing a new identity, and committing to new leadership.

Covenant is something deeply embedded in our religious heritage.

Our dissenting forebears when excluded from both privileged established church and the civil process were clear that they were bound together through free choice to be the People of God.

In England after the Restoration of Charles II and the Act of Uniformity was imposed, which led to the "Great Ejection" each dissenting congregation made a "covenant" or "compact" which stated how its members understood their mission and the obligations of being in fellowship together. "Freedom and mutual obligation" were key concepts (always held in healthy tension), and strongly informed the Basis of Union.

I make this point because when I came to Goulburn and asked how the scattered congregations were linked together and what were the expectations of their relationship, the answer was blank looks! Given that one of my tasks is to clarify relationships, this led to the idea that we would aim during the year to create Memoranda of Understanding between congregations and the corporate entity which links us all together. This then would objectify expectations between



each; such expectations being made assuming "freedom and mutual obligation".

A new name

We are considering giving ourselves a new name (no one likes "Linked Centre"!). The name most widely agreed is "The Southern Tablelands Parish". This geo-social region roughly defines the area we all share and retains a sense that we all have a missional relationship to a community larger than each town. It also avoids suggesting a too Goulburn centric image and any dominance associated with it.

Integrity of each congregation

There will be a statement, which affirms the integrity of each congregation, but requires that each describe itself in terms of its life and mission – particularly in the town and district where they are placed. This is particularly important given that often there is a perception that structures have been imposed upon congregations without any consultation.

Included in this, is an agreement and expectation that each church is

responsible to maintain and keep their properties in good condition.

Objectify mutual obligations

We will objectify mutual obligations within the "parish". Examples are a willingness to support mission endeavours of the whole region; how each will contribute to the support of ministerial placement(s); a consensed corporate plan and rhythm for worship services for each centre in the parish; sharing input into the parish website; the role of elders and how responsibility is exercised in leading worship.

Parish Obligations

Obligations from the parish (the Combined Church Council) would include: pastoral support and resourcing from ministerial placements; provision of an administrative centre (still in Goulburn); a composite budget and common financial services; support in times of crisis (the fencing program earlier in 2013 is a good example).

This process is already proving to be energising. One thing our forebears knew was that a covenant had to be "in writing" and formally recognised. This has already begun with each congregation submitting its own specific profile for the "Parish Profile" which has been sent to Presbytery.

Celebration planned

However, the covenant between congregations together and the whole parish will eventually be formalised in a great celebration later in the year. A foretaste was experienced recently when all congregations combined at Dalton to celebrate the 36th Anniversary of the Uniting Church. People testified that the Spirit of the risen Christ was present and active on that day!

Jonathan Barker
Goulburn Linked Centre

Koori Kids

Working side by side in Belconnen

UnitingCare Kippax's involvement in Koori Kids was recently recognized with a Reconciliation Week award by the ACT Government for work done in relationship building. UnitingCare Kippax Emergency Relief Worker, Stuart Anderson, describes the partnership between West Belconnen Child and Family centre, UnitingCare Kippax and the Belconnen Community Centre.

For many years UnitingCare Kippax has provided potential points of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through its various programs. West Belconnen is a culturally diverse area of Canberra. Over the past six months UnitingCare Kippax assisted 1013 households or 1972 individuals with emergency material and financial aid. Of these households 36% identified as coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse background and 13% identified as coming from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Emergency Material and Financial Aid (EFMA) program

We have provided assistance to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, particularly those going through financial hardship or needing assistance to attend funerals and other traditional occasions.

Whilst meeting genuine need, the inherent difficulty with such a relationship is that it comes from a position of differential power. Reciprocity and long term relationship building is difficult. It was with this in mind that UnitingCare Kippax sought to develop stronger and long lasting relationships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Partnership possibility

In 2010 the West Belconnen Child and Family centre was established across the road from the Kippax Uniting Community Centre. The centre is effectively a hub for health, allied health and community workers to engage with the local community across its wide array of programs.

The centre was also funded to focus on service provision to indigenous families living in West Belconnen. The establishment of the centre opened possibilities for relationship building between UnitingCare Kippax and the centre, with a view to developing lasting partnerships.

Early in 2011 a new and exciting possibility emerged from the centre's established Strong Women's Group for indigenous women, many of which were mothers of school-aged children. In co-operation with UnitingCare Kippax and Belconnen Community Services a children's and youth group called Koori Kids was started.

Koori Kids

One member of each organization staffed the group and whilst gatherings are primarily held at the centre, they also rotate to UnitingCare Kippax to take advantage of the large indoor hall and kitchen facilities.

Children participating in the program had opportunities to learn traditional indigenous painting and dance with instruction provided by indigenous



artists. Cooking, ball sports, sharing stories and laughter were also added to the mix. As UnitingCare Kippax's representative I found it an amazing experience to develop lasting relationships with young people participating in the group.

The group is still running today and continues to introduce new indigenous young people to each other and their culture.

Most importantly the group still embraces a spirit of co-operation between the three organizations and the recognition that together in partnership we are able to achieve so much more than we would alone.

Stuart Anderson
UnitingCare Kippax

Thanks to Robert Tupper

Image by Duncan Macleod



Robert is one of many people whose commitment to Christ and membership within the Uniting Church in Australia has been lived out in the life of Canberra Region Presbytery and the wider Uniting Church.

Over the year we have expressed our appreciation for the long and faithful service of Graeme Lowe as Presbytery Treasurer and Averill Edwards who, amongst many other responsibilities, served as Presbytery Chairperson. In this edition of *Perspective* we express our appreciation to Robert Tupper who, like the others mentioned, understands his commitment to Christ as a call to offer his gifts and abilities to the wider church.

Each of us has the privilege of using our gifts and experience for the good of Christ's mission through the Church. Robert has offered himself widely and

generously and our church is the better for his service. Not all of us can contribute as extensively as Robert has, nor for such a long period. The issue is not how much and how long. What is important is our willingness to serve in ways that flow from our unique abilities, opportunities and contexts.

Thank you Robert for your willingness to serve Christ and the Church over many years, sharing your experience and giftedness as an expression of your faith.

Kevin Dilks, Presbytery Minister (Pastoral/ Administration)

A history of service

1969

Soon after moving to Canberra in 1968, Robert found himself recruited into two housing committees; one overseeing the building of housing for ministry staff of the then Methodist Church and a joint commission for church development in Canberra, involving housing for either a Methodist, Presbyterian or Congregational minister in new areas.

1977 to 2013

At Union when Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches came together as the Uniting Church, the committees Robert was on morphed into the Presbytery Residence Committee. Robert was the inaugural convenor, continuing in that capacity and as treasurer until June this year. At the end of June he handed over management of the Presbytery-owned residences having served a total of 43 years as both convenor and treasurer.

1980's Robert's experience in building, including financial management of projects, led to

- appointment as Chairperson of the Presbytery Finance and Property Committee and then Chairperson of the Presbytery Finance Sub-Committee and membership on the Presbytery Property Sub-Committee.
- participation in the larger scale Northbourne Commission which led to the building of the City Church and the adjacent tower block
- ongoing leadership on the Pilgrim House Policy and Management Committees which continues to the present day.

1990's onwards

- 1996-99 Chairperson of Presbytery and Chairperson of the Pastoral Relations Committee remaining a member of the latter until 2005 and Presbytery rep on the Canberra Churches Council.

- Chairperson of the Standing Committee for 2 years then continuing to serve as a co-opted member
- 1997-2007 Presbytery Rep to Council of Synod;
- 1998 + member of the Synod Committee for Discipline
- 2003 + member of the Synod Fund Management Committee

Robert continues to serve on the Pilgrim House Policy and Management Committees, the Synod Committee for Discipline and the Synod Fund Management Committee and is currently on six months leave as Chairperson of the Presbytery Finance Sub-Committee and as a member of the Presbytery Property Sub-Committee.

Little Church in the Trees

Noel Smart shares how a local community worked together to rejuvenate the little Uniting Church at Bodalla.

Narooma, Bermagui, Bodalla and Cobargo lie south of Batemans Bay and together form the Mount Dromedary Parish.

The Uniting Church at Bodalla was constructed in 1966 in a beautiful situation amongst some of the south coast's famous spotted gums.

While the building has remained structurally sound, the grounds have deteriorated and are no longer considered safe for our older members.

Two new families in the congregation recognised the situation and the need to do something about it.

In November 2012, ideas were mooted and presented to the small congregation. Improving the landscaping, painting and decorating appealed to the members but questions arose about the ability to do the work, to say nothing of how to fund it.

After further work, the folk doing the planning received congregational approval to go ahead.

Generosity abounds

The Narooma-based Council of the Mt Dromedary Parish presented the Bodalla congregation with a generous donation of \$6000. Obviously this would not cover the entire project, but several members made donations as they could afford toward the project.

The second issue was an ageing congregation who were not able to do the work. The project managers called the Corrective Services Department from Batemans Bay, who agreed to help.

Their work crew took our church to heart treating it like their own personal project and their supervisor, Tony Anastasi, devoted so much time and effort himself.



See Presbytery website canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au for more photos

More 'Good Samaritans'

Bodalla contractor, Bill McConky, who had brought in his machine to scrape and level the site, was asked 'how much?' and said it was a donation to the little church.

A Moruya landscape company, Greenlands Nursery, offered 10-12 tonnes of crushed stone to surface the car parking area, again as a donation.

A local resident donated their 'as new' organ to replace ours, which has become a little the worse for wear. A local painter, Mat Gill (Gillie), did the repairs, painted two buildings and supplied all materials for \$1200 - a saving of \$6000.

Gillie also offered to assist the work crew with technical advice and help with the more critical tasks. His time and other expenses would be considered a community donation.

The work begins

New concrete paths were poured; older ones widened; disabled access greatly improved and kitchen facilities upgraded. The project continued to grow, with under-ground drains to control watershed across the sloping site, timber edges for gardens and new side fencing.

Native plants were put in place by a work crew member studying horticulture.

Completed and paid for

With a total cost around \$10,000, the project is all paid for. Initially it only involved the area in front of the church but expanded manifold to cover the entire block. This includes our bushland area now cleared and native self-sown plants encouraged to flourish. Without the Corrective Services crew and generosity of traders, the cost would have been staggering and unattainable. The final bill could have reached \$50,000.

There is to be an Opening Day (date still to be determined) and all are welcome to come along and see what a small congregation can do with a bit of motivation, dedication and the support of the local community.

Noel Smart
Bodalla Uniting Church

Come and see us when down the coast. Our 'little church in the trees' is on the corner of Princes Highway & Clarke Street, Bodalla - Worship 11am



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