

Perspective

Volume 21 Issue 95 | Summer 2015



uniting
church
Canberra Region
Presbytery

The cover image: Word cloud on Advocacy using wordle.net. Advocacy is Presbytery's theme for its February 2015 meeting and this issue of Perspective.

Perspective (Presbytery News ISSN 1322-8323) is published by Canberra Region Presbytery, Uniting Church in Australia and printed by **Elect Printing**, Fyshwick. Canberra Region Presbytery is a member of the Australasian Religious Press Association. **Opinions and advertisements** contained in *Perspective* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Canberra Region Presbytery.

Presbytery meeting 16th May is when the next *Perspective* will be distributed. **Contributions are due by 17th April.** Contact the editorial team at Presbytery Office, GPO Box 221, Canberra ACT.

Web canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au
Facebook facebook.com/CanberraRegionPresbytery
Twitter twitter@ucacanberra

Contacts

Presbytery Office: 02 6248 9311

Carolyn McAllister office@crp.unitingchurch.org.au

Presbytery Minister (Pastoral & Admin) Rev Kevin Dilks 0400 361 468
k.dilks@me.com

Presbytery Minister (Mission & Education) Geoff Wellington
0400 831 445 presbyterymande@tpg.com.au

Community Development Coordinator - ACT Region: Bri Griffiths (Mon-Wed) 0427 038 180 bgriffiths@unitingcarens.wact.org.au

Treasurer: Alex Pringle 0408 004 753 treasurer@crp.unitingchurch.org.au

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?*
approx \$1500
- *How is the document funded?*
two regular advertisements (Greenhills Centre and Uniting Financial Services) and a grant from Greenhills.

From the Chair

God's loving glue

It is a privilege to serve as Chair of Presbytery, a role I never imagined I would be asked to undertake.

Who am I? I grew up in the Methodist Church in Melbourne and was fortunate to spend some of my school years under the inspirational leadership of Rev Dr A H Wood at Methodist Ladies' College.

I worship at O'Connor Uniting where I host weekly contemplative prayer, preside at the Sacraments and am the contact point for the gardeners in the community garden situated on the old tennis courts. My other interests include politics, inter-governmental relations, reading and cooking.

Since commencing my work with Presbytery, I have met many people in our region, salt of the earth people, who are making significant contributions to their communities in very quiet but determined ways.

I see the Uniting Church uniting people, being God's loving glue that helps hold together those most in need, together with other caring people in the community. This is the church we are called to be, a people living Jesus' call to love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

As society wilts under the pressure of life, we might find we are in an unfamiliar form of church, responding to need when and wherever it presents itself in unexpected ways. Let's be bold and adapt, helping each other within in order to help those without. Change is better than stagnation, it can be life-giving if at times confronting.

We are a quietly courageous church and I believe we are up for whatever lies ahead, don't you? We either believe or we don't, we trust or we don't. This courage is exemplified in many of the smaller churches which struggle to keep going in the belief that wherever God has planted us, we belong. I look forward to visiting these churches as soon as I can.

Advocacy

The theme of advocacy resonates with the history and life of the Uniting Church. As individuals we live church every day in whatever we do however mundane it may seem at times, some days more successfully than others, as we draw beside those whose voice is not heard both within the church and outside it. As a local church we support and uphold our communities through prayer and practical ministry.



As a presbytery, we support congregations and their ministry agents and advocate on this region's behalf. As a nationwide entity, the Uniting Church speaks out on government policy and calls for a more just society.

Please pray

As for the church itself, 2015 promises to be a challenging year. Nothing seems to galvanise thinking and discussion like a financial crisis and the question of property. Many are angry with the decision by Synod to no longer fund presbyteries and it is an issue that will be addressed.

A church is not property or budgets. The church is all of us and we are responsible to manage our resources prudently. We will be working hard to do so for the welfare of all in this region so please pray for your presbytery staff and the committed volunteers on committees who work on your behalf.

I encourage you to live fully in the moment and plan prayerfully for the future. It is God's church, not ours, and so we have every reason to be confident knowing that "Faithful is He Who is calling you and utterly trustworthy, and He will also do it." Thessalonians 5:24.

Vanessa Crimmins
Chairperson



Situated in the beautiful Murrumbidgee River Corridor, close to the junction of the Cotter and Murrumbidgee Rivers, Greenhills is a place for learning, renewal and retreat...Canberra's premier rural camp and conference facility, only 20 minutes from the city centre!

FACILITIES

- Dining Room – seating up to 200 people
- Auditorium – 180 people, conference facilities included
- Rotary Hall – 120 people conference facilities included
- Outdoor Chapel with Firepit
- BBQ areas with covered seating
- Large sports oval and games room
- Beach volleyball and half-basketball courts
- Meditation Garden

DAY CONFERENCES

- 2 Conference Halls, 9 individual meeting rooms
- Audio/visual equipment, data projector, whiteboard, TV/DVD unit (included in cost)
- Free internet access available (LAN)

ACCOMMODATION

- Group accommodation for up to 182 people
- All rooms with ensuite facilities and heating
- Blankets/duonas and pillows provided
- Separate Teachers/Leaders rooms with ensuite
- Includes specially designed rooms for disabled access
- Bookings include full catering service in our Dining Room
- 4 separate self-contained Units each sleeping up to 4 people
- 1 self-contained Cottage sleeping up to 6 people
- Units & Cottage contain kitchenette, bathroom, TV, heating – also ideal as family holiday units.
- **Whole site capacity of 204 people**





Presbytery Minister (Mission & Education) Report to Presbytery meeting 21st February 2015

Welcome to the new year of 2015.

After a welcomed quieter

December and January period and a week's break it's suddenly become very busy here at the presbytery office again.

It promises to be an exciting year full of many activities and important choices to be made for the future shape of ministry and mission both here in the Canberra Region and across the NSW/ACT Synod generally.

Advocacy

The theme for this presbytery gathering is "advocacy". One way to think about advocacy is to look at the role of standing in the place of another or acting on behalf of another less able to do so themselves. The church sometimes refers to Jesus and the Holy Spirit as acting as advocate to the Father interceding on our behalf in this sort of way.

Another way to consider advocacy is to think about someone, or a group, enabling, resourcing or skilling the other somehow. It could also be helping the other to discover the strengths already inherent and enabling those strengths to become life giving for the community as a whole. This way of considering advocacy feels a little more empowering to me.

In the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church lays on each of its councils, responsibilities to act as advocate in this sort of way.

"The Presbytery shall have such oversight as is necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area committed to it; it shall stimulate and encourage the Congregations within the bounds, providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and in their participation in wider aspects of the work of the church" (Constitution Part B 26).

The Canberra Region Presbytery gives expression to this through its mission statement.

"The Presbytery will assist the congregations and other bodies within its bounds to:

- discern the mission of God in their local areas

- discover, access and develop the resources that are available to enable them to live out the mission of God."

In Congregations

Congregations likewise have a role as advocates; as those who empower and build up. The regulations talk about these responsibilities as:

"those who meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share the wider responsibilities of the church and to serve the world" (Regulations 3.1.1(a))

In this way the presbytery and congregations are challenged to actively participate in the life of discipleship that "advocates" on behalf of the other. Building the other up so that life in relationship with the risen Christ might be entered into more fully. This is a real challenge in our society today where the individual experience and the good of the individual takes centre stage.

Keeping a balance

In a recent conversation on the individualization of society, with others from around the Synod, the quote below from Tom Bandy was offered as an approach to the church, of believing, belonging, intimacy and ecstasy (or transformation and transforming the world beyond ourselves). This idea from Tom Bandy gives a way forward that keeps in balance the self care of growing as a mature Christian disciple and acting as advocate for the other.

What do you do in your life that continues to sustain and grow your faith and at the same time, as mature disciples, act as advocate for others?

As the presbytery gathers to celebrate and encourage the life of congregations and enters into discernment as a council of the Uniting Church, we would do well to ponder God's leading as advocates of each other, that as congregations and as the presbytery we might more fully live out the mission of God for the sake of the world.



Geoff Wellington
0400 831 445



Presbytery Minister (Pastoral & Administration) Report to Presbytery meeting 21st February 2015

Once again we find ourselves at the beginning of the year, doing our best to refocus our brains from formless holidays to ordered work.

At the beginning of the year the immediate responsibilities of Presbytery quickly find focus and become demands as Inductions and Commissionings, the first Presbytery meeting, all need to be organised and joint Presbyteries meetings need to be attended. It all comes as rather a shock after a leisurely holiday, even though it is the same every year and therefore shouldn't be a surprise.

In the midst of the business it is reassuring to be able to report that: **Rev Chris Lockley** has been inducted into the ministry position with St James, Curtin, and St Margaret's, Hackett; **Rev David Stuart** inducted with Yass Parish and Murrumbateman; Daniel Mossfield commissioned as Pastor at Queanbeyan with responsibility for Children, Youth and Young Adults.

The obvious question to ask at this time of the year is "What will be the priorities for the year?" A subsequent and equally important question immediately follows: "How will the priorities be actioned?" Two key priorities for this year are:

1. Grace Community

At its meeting in November 2014 the Presbytery approved the re-focus of our priorities to helping the ministry of Grace Community in Goulburn become sustainable before we take any steps to venture in to other new development areas. The Presbytery agreed that we should advocate amongst our own congregations seeking support for this missional project of our church.

2. Congregational Appraisal

The Presbytery 5-year plan, accepted earlier in 2014, identified the need to engage in a Presbytery-wide assessment or appraisal of all our congregations. The purpose of this appraisal is to develop a Presbytery-wide understanding of the character, activities and health of our congregations as well as an appreciation of local property and finance issues.

The gathering of this sort of information has now become even more important as all Presbyteries begin to consider, together, how we can envision a sustainable, healthy and thriving future for our church.

As the Presbytery Chairperson, Vanessa, Geoff Wellington and I engage with other Presbyteries and with Synod on preferable and achievable futures we need to be able to advocate on behalf of the congregations of this Presbytery. To do this we need to have the best information possible about each congregation. This is not going to be about whether a congregation is "passing" or "failing" some arbitrary test. The intent is to provide a clear and helpful picture of each congregation as we participate in the growing of cooperation between Presbyteries and the seeking of wisdom as to the future God holds for our church.

At the meeting of Presbytery, just held, this appraisal was an item for discussion in which we sought the wisdom and insight of Presbytery members, people from all congregations, concerning the sorts of information that would be most helpful for us to have as we enter into this wider-church journey. Their suggestions will be collated and contribute to the final resource that we will use for the purpose of developing a clear picture of who and what the Canberra Region Presbytery, and therefore its congregations, is.

In the past it has been difficult for Presbyteries to engage with each other in an open and trusting way. The time for faithful discernment and Christ-like mutuality has come.

Please pray for Vanessa, Geoff and myself as we represent you, our Presbytery, in this process.

Please pray for all Presbyteries across the Synod of NSW and the ACT as, together, we seek to hear God speak to us.

Please pray for all the congregations in our Presbytery as they think about how best to help Vanessa, Geoff and myself represent (advocate?) all our congregations on this path of mutual trust and faithful discernment.



Kevin Dilks
0400 361 468

responding to need: a church for the community

Advocacy as part of the mission of the Church is the theme of this Perspective and the first meeting of Presbytery this year. As Director of UnitingCare Australia, Lin Hatfield Dodds describes the place of advocacy in the life of the Uniting Church nationally, what is currently happening and how congregations can be involved.

The Uniting Church in Australia has a long history of being at mission in communities through the delivery of social services.

Through UnitingCare, we provide services and supports to one in eight Australians each year. We employ 39,000 staff whose work is supported by 27,000 volunteers, and we provide services to children, young people, families, older people, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, the unemployed, and people living in poverty right across Australia.

We provide our services without fear or favour, to anyone who needs them.

We provide aged care services in nursing homes and to people living at home in the community, employment services, disability services, homelessness & affordable housing services.

We support families in crisis, providing emergency relief and relationship and financial counselling. We provide out of home care for children, and run child care services. We work with vulnerable young people.

We run mental health services, and services for people living with addictions.

That all sounds really big. And it is. But we didn't start that way. UnitingCare services developed, and are still developing locally as a faithful response to need in the community.

From small beginnings

One hundred and eighty years ago in Perth a group of people in a local congregation organised themselves to provide practical support for families who couldn't find work or somewhere to live. That ministry was the foundation for what is now UnitingCare West.



Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director, UnitingCare Australia. www.unitingcare.org.au

One hundred years ago in Sydney, a man who was deeply concerned about the wellbeing of children without families made a bequest to his church to provide ongoing funding to care for children at risk and invest in research into what we could do as a nation to ensure that every child can flourish. That vision and gift was the foundation for what is now UnitingCare NSW and the ACT.

Sixty years ago in Brisbane, a nurse was supported financially by her congregation to visit elderly people living alone. So that people knew who she was when she visited, she wore a blue nurses uniform and called herself a Blue Nurse. That ministry was the foundation for what is Australia's largest social service - BlueCare - that is part of the ministry of UnitingCare Queensland. I could tell these stories all day, with gratitude for the faithful, hope-full vision of those who came before us and whose faith could not allow them to see misery and need without responding in very practical ways.

Living out a Christian vision

This orientation to see and respond to poverty, disadvantage and vulnerability is grounded in our church's incarnational understanding of God's presence in our world.

We understand that Christ's presence with and love for the most vulnerable compels us to stand and minister with them as we seek to ensure that everyone can live a decent life. Jesus' ministry challenges us to give more serious attention to the nature of service to one another.

Engaging with the world through social services provides the opportunity for us as a church to live out a Christian vision which is all inclusive and which looks for equality of opportunity for individuals, communities and peoples.

Across the Uniting Church, our congregational life grows and sustains faith that continues to develop social services in the community through people seeing need in their local area and responding to it.

For example

My own congregation at Kippax in Canberra is a case in point.

When the Uniting Church formed in 1977, this new congregation decided to do away with church buildings to focus on mission. We met for 10 years in a school on Sundays for worship, and in each other's homes during the week.

After a decade we decided to build what we called a "church in the marketplace" - a building for the people of God to serve the community through as well as to worship in.

We moved to a disadvantaged area of Canberra and settled in to identify and respond to the needs of the community that we became a part of.

Twenty five years on, and Kippax Uniting Church sees more than 1,500 people through its doors every week. Some come to worship. Some come for our children's playgroups.

Many come for the social services we provide: emergency relief, financial counselling, parenting training, or housing support. All are part of the community at Kippax.

Our congregational life is greatly enriched by the interrelationship of the more traditional activities of the congregation with its social service to the community.

Three ways of expressing faith

Part of the way we express our faith in the Uniting Church is in our congregational life - our worship, our prayer life, our learning.

Part of the way we express our faith is in our service to those who are the most marginalised - through our aged care services, our community care, our children and family services, our work with and love for people with disabilities and people who are unemployed and have no hope for the future.

And part of the way we express our faith is in our advocacy to Government and the wider community. We advocate for the dignity of all, and for policies that will build communities in which everyone belongs, can contribute and is valued.

UnitingCare Australia as advocate

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the UnitingCare network, leading our church's national advocacy work on behalf of vulnerable and marginalised people. At the moment this work includes working to ensure that energy prices for people on low incomes aren't unnecessarily high. It means defending payments for vulnerable Australians who are out of work, and highlighting the need for access to quality childcare for every child.

It means working with the Government to help secure and strengthen the National Disability Insurance Scheme and aged care reforms, giving more choice and opportunity to the people we exist to serve.

Transformation

My encouragement to you is to pay attention to what is happening in our Parliaments and to have a say. Get to know your MPs and Senators, meet with them regularly, build a relationship and offer a voice into that context that speaks of hope and a reconciled world.

In the Uniting Church we are part of a movement of people who believe that our faith is alive, and that it invites us to be active in our world because we believe God is active in our world. We are committed to compassion, justice, the reconciliation between people, and the reconciliation and renewal all of creation.

We believe that we are a pilgrim people on the way to the promised end. We seek not only to transform the lives of individuals, or even communities, but to be a movement of transformation in our communities and nation. UnitingCare Australia is part of your story of transformation in this nation.

Lin Hatfield Dodds
National Director, UnitingCare Australia

Chaplaincy & advocacy It's complicated



Advocacy is a tough one for chaplains.

We are not counsellors or social workers. The professionals in those fields keep a wary eye on us just to make sure we do not stray over their borders. We work in teams in hospitals and prisons and we must not sacrifice the trust our

colleagues invest in us when sharing their concerns and confidences. Whether we like it or not, we are part of the machinery of the system.

And yet, we listen to the patients and their families. We hear their troubles and responses. Mistakes are made. Not every system or person is perfect and sometimes bad things happen and we see them. We know that something went wrong and yet, this is not a conversation we can have with the patient - all we can do is listen...and later participate as much as allowed in the continuous improvement of imperfect systems. We have to remember that these systems do a lot more good than harm and one of the reasons they can is the faith people put in the professionals. Faith has a big role to play.

And faith brings me to the second discomfort in chaplaincy advocacy ... and I note, it may not be as uncomfortable for other chaplains - but perhaps it should be. Do we advocate to God? Should we? And if so, when?

I have a deep abhorrence for the missionary zeal of some chaplains who would rush in and without a 'by your leave' start praying on your behalf. Harrumph! How dare they? To me, this is disrespectful of the person, their faith background and their personal beliefs. There are people who really see themselves as essential intermediaries and to be honest, this scares me. It is possible that they do not mean to exclude or undervalue our personal relationship with the Divine but their eagerness sometimes has an edge that implies you're just not very good at it and you'd better leave it to an expert.

That's not to say there isn't a time for prayer. I would prefer to pray with a patient and we often do, but sometimes after deeply listening to a patient's concerns, I will be moved to gently ask, 'would you like me to say a little prayer?'

This is an opportunity to name all the aspects of their lives that have been worrying them: to honour all of the hurts, worries and issues; to prove that they've been heard and then to offer those troubles up.

My belief system does not allow me to order God around, demand healing or expect prescribed intervention. But I do accept that God's presence gives us courage and grace, can help us let go our worries and reveal blessings and opportunities in the bleakest circumstances.

I have seen the results of sharing the yoke, of leaving it in the hands of God. I know that prayer helps us reconnect and understand God's presence, especially in our time of need. Prayer helps us to remember that we are never alone.

That's OK for church people but what about the others?

Another chaplain told me recently about a person who was very ill and very worried. After a long conversation, the chaplain understood the prognosis was bad and this person had no one to tell it to.

They talked a long time after which, the chaplain asked, 'Would you like to pray?' and the patient said no that was not their thing. The chaplain, unusually, pushed forward and asked, 'Well, would you like me to say a blessing for you?' The patient said he had never had a blessing. It was worth a try. So the chaplain blessed him. He then asked the patient, 'How did that feel?' And with a broad smile the patient said, 'Pretty good!'

Having said, 'I don't like to advocate', that doesn't mean I never do. I do. Patients are in my personal prayers, with or without their permission; I include them without naming (unless asked) in the chapel prayers for the people; I do approach nurses on behalf of patients; I have given out information about the Aged Care Advocate to patients if I felt they were being bullied; I have reported misbehavior and I have referred many issues to social workers. I have represented families in conversations with intensive care staff. And I repeatedly include social justice issues in my writing and liturgies.

So yes, Chaplains do advocate but we can't just weigh in the way a friend or relative can. It's complicated and sensitive. We can't blunder in as if we are essential and gifted intermediaries. We have to consider the welfare of the patients, staff and system and balance empowerment and collegiality. We also have to respect our own theology as well as the patient's.

Jean Shannon
Hospital Chaplaincy Co-ordinator

Social Justice & advocacy Drug law reform

The Presbytery Social Justice Group has chosen drug law reform as its highest priority advocacy issue for 2015.

We came to this view over several meetings. Members of the group also nominated other pressing justice and environmental concerns - including Constitutional recognition of Indigenous people (our second priority), homelessness, Australia's treatment of refugees, inequality and global warming.

In the 1990s several congregations in this Presbytery were prominent in supporting drug law reform, in particular a proposal for an ACT heroin trial and, several years later, for a safe injecting place. These proposals were not taken up by our government. (In NSW, however, the medically supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross was established and is still run by the Uniting Church.)



Medically Supervised Injecting Centre run by UnitingCare in Kings Cross, Sydney. Virtual tour and fact sheet available on www.sydneymsic.com

There is a strong sense in the Group that the time is right for a renewed push for drug law reform.

Globally, and in this country, there is a growing recognition that policies of prohibition of illicit drugs have failed and that using the criminal law to address what is fundamentally a health and social issue does not work and, indeed, creates more problems.

Hundreds of Australians die each year from drug overdoses. The lives of countless others, drug-takers and their families, are blighted. People accused of drug-related crime fill our courts and drug offenders fill our prisons. The costs to government and society are huge. Meanwhile, criminals thrive on the profits of drug trafficking and their activities weaken the social fabric.

There is an emerging body of evidence, especially from Europe, that innovative policies which in important respects depart from hard-line prohibition can have positive results.

This evidence supports the increasing call, both in Australia and abroad, for reformed drug policies that minimise harm to drug users and their families, promote rehabilitation of those dependent on drugs and utilise well designed drug education and prevention strategies. Amongst other beneficial outcomes these policies can actually work to reduce the availability of illicit drugs.

To this persuasive case for reform, as Christians, should we not add that there is something very wrong with a policy which treats people with a drug addiction - what is essentially an illness - as criminals? 'Outside the law' often means beyond the reach of government services and social supports.

All too often these people die from an overdose, alone in alley-ways. Very often this happens because help was not available when they sought it.

In recent years the church has reached out to and supported asylum seekers and refugees, another marginalised group for whom there has been majority community indifference or hostility. We need now to reach out to people with addictions.

In November 2012, Presbytery reaffirmed its support for harm minimisation policies in relation to illicit drug use, expressed support for a national summit on drug policy and called for the matter to be further considered at Synod and Assembly and drawn to the attention of all levels of Government. We have not acted on this decision. We should do so in 2015.

Presbytery will be considering drug law reform at its February 2015 meeting. We encourage congregations to become better informed about the issues. We recommend reading:

- a recent discussion paper on drug law reform by the NSW Bar Association, available at <http://www.nswbar.asn.au/>
- two reports from 2012 by Australia 21 on the consequences of prohibition of illicit drugs and on alternative policies, available at <http://www.australia21.org.au/>
- the Presbytery Social Justice Group's submission to the February 2015 Presbytery meeting, on drug law reform, available on the Presbytery website: canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au

Presbytery Social Justice Group

Seeing as God sees



Sue Dunbar, Director of Barnabas Ministries Inc. and a Pastor of the Uniting Church in Australia.

John O’Donohue in *Eternal Echoes* says, “Prayer issues from that threshold where soul and life interflow; it is the conversation between desire and reality”.

This seems like a good place to begin a conversation about prayer and advocacy. We are all too aware of our “reality”; war, violence, displacement, abuse, homelessness, sickness, environmental degradation and so the list goes on. In the light of this, what is our “desire”? To be shockingly naïve, our desire is “world peace”, “no child goes to bed hungry”, “a safe place where all may flourish”. In other words; “your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven”.

But what does this mean? What happens at this threshold where prayer is elicited? We are stretched between our reality and our desire. Prayer happens as we allow ourselves to be stretched, changed, formed and transformed as we stay in this place of sustained ambiguity.

In terms of advocacy, is our prayer an attempt to twist God’s arm, to force God’s intervention in a situation? I don’t think so. Our prayer is expressing our desire to God, more often than not, the desire that God has already expressed for all creation, poetically imaged in such passages as Isaiah 11:1-9 where the “wolf lies down with the lamb”. So we are reflecting back to God what God’s desire already is. Is that all we are doing when we pray? Again, I don’t think so. The clue here, is the idea of “threshold”, a crossing over place.

Barnabas Ministries, of which Sue is Director, is an ecumenical agency offering spiritual care and nourishment for those on the journey of faith both as individuals and groups. Quiet days, retreats, workshops...you can discover more on the website at www.barnabasministries.org.au or ring (02) 6295 6766.

Somehow, mysteriously, prayer creates the possibility of desire becoming reality.

Perhaps an example would be helpful here - the powerful story of the prayers for peace that took place in St Nicholas church in Leipzig, East Germany. A small group of people began gathering on Monday evenings in 1982 to pray for peace. After seven years of faithful prayer, this small band swelled to 70,000 people in October, 1989 that peacefully protested for regime change.

Exactly one month later the Berlin Wall came down. Over those seven years, as people prayed, a new vision or possibility formed in their hearts and they were transformed along the way so that in spite of their fear and threats of violence, they found the courage to make a stand. (For more detail see www.bbc.co.uk/religion/0/24661333 “Did a prayer meeting really bring down the Berlin Wall and End the Cold War?”)

This story also demonstrates that there is both an inner and outer expression to prayer.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel beautifully describes the outer expression when he writes of marching with Dr Martin Luther King at Selma in 1965. He says “when I marched in Selma, my feet were praying.”

For me, one of the most profound spiritual experiences of my life was when I walked, with thousands of others, across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on Sunday May 28, 2000 to say “Sorry”. And right now there is the example of the “Love makes a Way” movement.

Our bodies are the crucible of incarnation. When our prayer, our desire and our bodies come together, we open a door through which God can move and we are never the same; neither is the world around us.

This is the outer expression of prayer and just as important is the inner journey that takes place in prayer. How do we describe the inner experience of prayer? Of course there are libraries full of books trying to do this.

(continued next page)



Alison in a new UnitingCare role

With Bri’s return, people may wonder why I am still around, sharing her office and occasionally answering the Presbytery phone.

I have joined the Community Development Partnership Program in a slightly different capacity. My role now is to work with the Community Development team across NSW to examine the effectiveness of our work and the impact we are having .

I will also continue to work with congregations on the South Coast as Bri is working in the ACT and surrounds, supporting congregations to connect more strongly with their communities to meet community needs.

Alison Inglis - ainglis@unitingcarenswwact.org.au, Mb: 0417 314 804

Bri back from leave

2014 was a busy year – for rather different reasons to those experienced at Presbytery or UnitingCare.

It was a delightful year with Huw joining our family, a tiring year juggling the needs of a baby and a three year old, a rewarding year watching sibling relationships develop and the sheer delight as they regularly wrestled one another on the floor.

On 2 Feb, I commenced again as the Community Development Coordinator for the ACT Region. I am enjoying catching up on all the developments of 2014 and the enthusiasm for new endeavours and expansion of projects in 2015. Already Safe Shelter are talking with Queanbeyan UC to give support for further homelessness services, the Social Justice Network is working with Presbytery to arrange meetings with ACT Government Ministers, and My HOME in Canberra is securing agreement to partner with and build at St James, Curtin. This year I look forward to revisiting our Vision for Canberra in 100 years and the Uniting Church’s role in shaping Canberra’s community. I look forward to hearing how congregations are building stronger relationships with their local communities, advocating for change, and/or identifying opportunities for us to do and be more in our mission as disciples of Christ.

Briony Griffiths – bgriffiths@unitingcarenswwact.org.au, Mb: 0427 038 180



Watermelon anyone? Bri with one year old Huw.

Seeing as God sees (continued from previous page)



I resonate with Sr Wendy Beckett who, in “The Gaze of Love”, describes it like this: “Prayer is God taking possession of us. We expose to Him what we are, and He gazes upon us with the creative eye of Holy Love. His gaze is transforming; He does not leave us in our poverty but draws into

being all we are meant to become...

If we fear the truth, if we are essentially reluctant to see what we have hidden from ourselves, then nothing can open our eyes... But if we want to pray, then we shall pray. There is nothing whatever that holds us back. “Naked desire meets naked God.”

Sr Wendy leaves us in no doubt that when we pray we will be exposed, we will begin to see as God sees not just the world out there but also the world in here, in our own hearts.

If we are truly honest then we know that all the things in the outer world that we desire to change, find resonances in the dark corners of our own hearts.

So, equally important in prayer, is this inner journey which enables us to befriend our darkness; to be transformed so that we no longer project our darkness outwards on to others but discover that it is absorbed in the holy gaze of God’s love.

As Pamela Chappell’s song says: “I can’t change the whole world wide but I can change the one inside, and so I start from heart to heart, one person at a time.”

So there are at least two aspects of this journey of prayer. The first is, that as we allow ourselves to be shaped and formed by our prayer and secondly, that our prayer finds expression in some appropriate action in the outer world.

For each person, the balance and expression will be different. However as Christians, we are called to engage in personal transformative prayer AND to live our response in the world.

Not only do we pray for God’s kingdom to come on earth but we also find ways to participate in bringing it into being.

**Sue Dunbar, BSc, DipEd, MA Spirituality
Director, Barnabas Ministries Inc. (02) 6295 6766**

It's about
shared
interest.

Returns
that
matter.

Community
investment.

Wealth
and
wellbeing.



Call 1300 133 673 or visit
unitingfinancial.com.au

Level 9, 222 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
PO Box A2178 Sydney South NSW 1235

Financial services are provided by The Uniting Church (NSW) Trust Association Limited ACN 000 022 480, ABN 89 725 654 978, AFSL 292186 and by The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (NSW) ABN 77 005 284 605 pursuant to a s.911A Corporations Act 2001 (Cth.) authorisation and APRA Banking Exemption No. 1 of 2014 ("Uniting Financial Services"), for The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT pursuant to ASIC Regulatory Guide 87 exemptions. Uniting Financial Services® is a registered trademark of The Uniting Church (NSW) Trust Association Limited and is used with permission by The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (NSW).
Neither The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT, The Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (NSW) nor Uniting Financial Services is prudentially supervised by APRA. An investment with or contributions will not benefit from the depositor protection provisions of the Banking Act 1959. All financial services and products are designed for investors who wish to promote religious and charitable purposes and for whom profit considerations are not of primary importance in their decision to invest.
Please refer to the Product Disclosure Statement and the Product Information Brochure for Terms and Conditions.