

# Perspective

Volume 21 Issue 97 | Winter 2015

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uniting  
church  
Canberra Region  
Presbytery

Getting to the heart of the matter:  
from institution to movement,  
practising the faith.



**uniting church**  
Canberra Region  
Presbytery

**The cover image:** A variation on 'cross-shaped love'. **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.

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## Perspective Q and A

- *How often do you publish Perspective and in what quantity?*  
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- *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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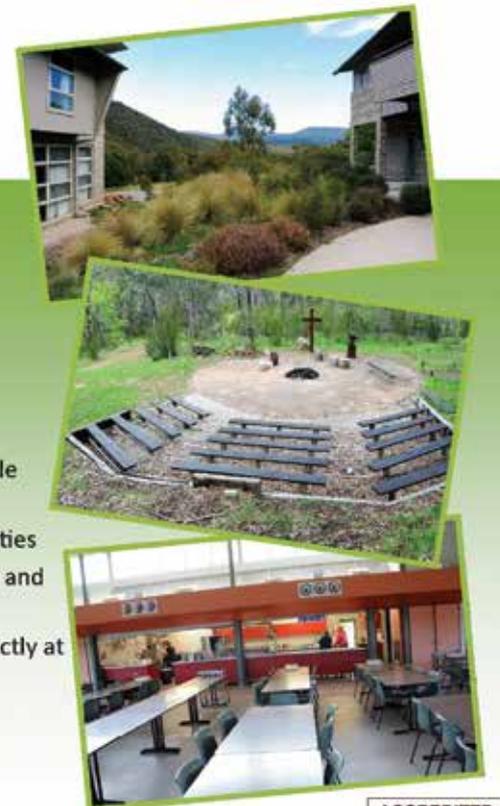
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# New Monasticism

**NEW MONASTICISM:** (n.)—movement of Jesus followers who are committed to a new way of life in community. See also: new-monastics, ordinary radicals, intentional Christian Communities.

Image: [www.ancientfuturefaithnetwork.org](http://www.ancientfuturefaithnetwork.org)

## Safespace and a new monastic community

In 2005 Mark founded a missional community in Telford called *safespace* and ran a night cafe for young adults. *safespace* developed into what has become known as a 'new monastic' community, seeking to base its life on spiritual disciplines and patterns of Christian discipleship. Mark speaks and teaches on new monasticism, leadership for mission and contextual mission. See also [www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/safespace](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/safespace).

## What is the 'new monasticism'?

New monasticism is not about a romantic withdrawal to beautiful and privileged places in the countryside, fleeing from the problems of the world, but rather a radical commitment to stay with and re-engage in mission, seeking the kingdom of God in places where God can feel absent. We have many friends throughout the world where there is either a deep spiritual hunger for meaning and belonging or a desire for hope and the alleviation of pain, hopelessness and suffering while rejecting mainstream Christianity.

So who is going to engage with the many people who are spiritually curious and hungry for transformation and liberation, seeking alternatives to the dehumanizing effects of the global market and what has become known as 'ecocide': the combination of global warming, deforestation and reducing biodiversity? What forms of church are going to assist such people who do not trust church and religion to experience Jesus Christ? Who is going to help such people to become Christian pilgrims?

## Rediscovering the heart of our faith

We believe that the distinctiveness of a new monastic community is the combination of a number of features. None of these features are unique to new monasticism, but it is the particular combination of these features that defines the essence of what new monasticism seeks to be:

1. A formal written rhythm of life that includes seasonal aspirations, spiritual practices and postures.
2. A commitment to being missional and contextual.
3. A variant vocation to being a new monastic 'monk', 'monk-friar' or 'friar'.
4. A commitment to participative governance.
5. Worship that is participative, contemplative and sacramental.
6. A commitment to non-dualism and non-tribalism.
7. A commitment to post-Christendom and servant discipleship.
8. Deeply Trinitarian in belief and practice.
9. Experimental and creative in spirit and practice.
10. Radical yet fully integrated into the local church.
11. Fluid at the edges yet deeply centred.
12. Flexible and relational by being small and missional.
13. Offering 'whole-of-life', incarnational and experiential approaches to Christian formation.
14. Balancing affirmation of contemporary society with the calling to be countercultural for the gospel.

## Mark Berry

**Guest Speaker  
at the Presbytery  
meeting 15th  
August 2015.**

The Uniting Church's Formation Education Discipleship (FED) unit of Assembly is co-ordinating the visit of Mark Berry to Australia in July and August 2015.



Mark, who is in Canberra from 15th to 17th August, is the Community Mission Facilitator with the Church Missionary Society in the UK.

A former youth worker, Mark has worked with the Church of England in several roles and is co-author with Ian Mobsby of: *A New Monastic Handbook: From Vision to Practice*, available from Mediacom Education Inc. for \$37.45 (postage free until 31 August 2015) [www.mediacom.org.au](http://www.mediacom.org.au) (Ph:1800 811 311).

*The information about new monasticism on this page is from the introduction to A New Monastic Handbook: From Vision to Practice in which the distinctive combination of features listed on the left, reference relevant chapters.*

*“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*

# Around the Presbytery

*Vanessa Crimmins, our Chairperson, reports*

**I would like to thank everyone who committed themselves to the two weeks of prayer and fasting for Christ-centred unity in the Presbytery.**

I ask you please to continue to pray for greater unity and deeper relationships between individual congregations and between regions across the Canberra Region Presbytery. We are one family, one which doesn't have to live together to be together. No matter where I visit, the welcome is always warm despite the fact that I come from the Presbytery and, for the rural and regional relatives, from Canberra!



## **New Testament Studies**

I am currently enjoying the **New Testament Studies course** run by Geoff Wellington with lectures provided by ministry agents and lay experts.

One lecture on the Good Samaritan was particularly powerful. I asked **Dr Basil Rebera** to reduce his hour long presentation to one page (!) and he graciously agreed to do so. His explanation of the story provides the bridge from the quest for Christ-centred unity both individually and within the church to the world, that is, everyone we encounter. You will find it on the following page.

## **Regional meetings**

Those who attended the last Presbytery meeting will have heard me talk of the priorities of unity and strengthening of the regions and the need to find smart ways to support one another, particularly those in the country and coast where the need for resources is great.

A first step was to hold regional meetings. A meeting of folk in the South Coast region was held at Bega on 18 July, the Northern region at Goulburn on 1 August and the Canberra Monaro region gathering will follow on 29 August at Queanbeyan. It was so encouraging to get together, hear one another's stories and discuss the many difficult issues affecting our rural and regional family. It is often incidental encounters that lead to new relationships individually and as faith communities.

The one thing we often fail to do for lack of time, is listen to one another. How often are we able to put aside time just to talk, encourage one another, compare notes or, simply sit in one another's presence and let the silence speak.

I hope that everyone who participates in these meetings, which will occur twice a year, will appreciate that we are all in this together to support one other.

I know some congregations have strong ties with other congregations already but if yours does not, I would welcome the chance to help facilitate such relationships.

*Please let the Presbytery office know if you are interested in getting to know another congregation with which you might have something in common, or not, as the case may be.*

## **Synod meeting of Presbytery Chairs**

On 18 June I attended a meeting of all NSW/ACT Chairs of Presbyteries hosted by the Synod. We met both with and without Synod staff. Our Moderator, Myung Hwa Park, attended both meetings and provided a big picture perspective and stressed her desire to see presbyteries working together more closely.

Frank views were exchanged on the current Synod's relationship with presbyteries, the financial situation of presbyteries, the Synod budget, the delivery of services and the difficulties being faced by diverse faith communities spanning the length and breadth of NSW and ACT.

**I made the following points on behalf of Presbytery;**

- \* Property rationalisation makes no sense to us.
- \* Congregations have indicated that resourcing from presbytery is placed above that from Synod and have responded to the cuts from Synod accordingly.
- \* We know our ground and will be led by the Holy Spirit in how we cultivate it.
- \* The Presbytery genuinely intends to participate in ongoing conversation about the future structure and funding our church.
- \* In resourcing of our congregations – support needs to be able to happen in a timely manner and that is why Synod staffing responses do not work.

We meet again on 20 August at the Wayside Chapel in Sydney.

I look forward to meeting many readers of *Perspective* as I continue my pilgrimage to the faith communities in the Canberra region presbytery.

I am learning a great deal and see the face of Jesus again and again.

**Vanessa Crimmins**  
*Presbytery Chairperson*

Following on from the article on the previous page, here is the precis of Dr Basil Rebera's lecture on the Good Samaritan presented at the New Testament Studies course run by Geoff Wellington, to which Vanessa refers.

# None is exceptional, none is beyond the pale

## Luke tells us that a custodian of the Jewish Law of Moses wanted to test Jesus: and asks, "What must I do to have eternal life?"

Jesus deftly asks what the Scripture, ie the Law of Moses, has to say. The man, trained in the Scripture answers, "Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself." "You're right," says Jesus, "Obey the Scripture and you will live." The two central commands of the Law of Moses had been affirmed by Jesus. It seemed the wind had been taken out of the man's sails. But now the man reveals his subterfuge: "Who is my neighbour?" he asks.

### 'Neighbour' is a misleading translation.

In English today it covers a gamut of meaning, from the person next door to anyone at the other end of the world, and for the Church, especially, anyone in need. The translation 'neighbour' has led to confusion about identity and to misunderstanding the central point of the parable.

The quotation from the Law of Moses (the Old Testament), about loving God and loving the 'neighbour' would have been in Hebrew and is a conflation of two passages from two different books of the Hebrew Scripture. The one about loving God is Deuteronomy 6.5 and the one about loving the 'neighbour' is Leviticus 19.18.

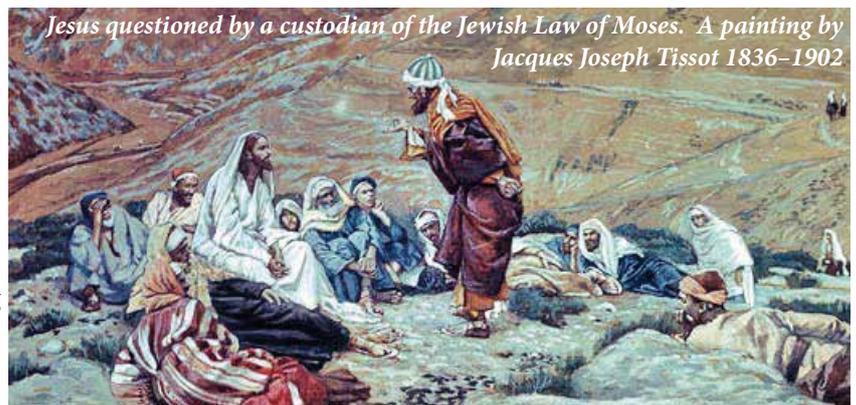
Both the man and Jesus knew that the point of the dispute was the identity of the Hebrew word, *re'aka*, mistranslated in English as 'your neighbour.' They also knew that it was only part of a larger passage Lv19.13-18. A reading of the whole passage will show that the Hebrew words translated 'your neighbour', 'your people', 'your kin' are one and the same: they are designations for members of the same community. Lv19.18, in English, should be: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people; instead you should love your compatriot as yourself."

The Hebrew word, *re'aka*, in Lv19.18 was reserved for a member of the Jewish community alone and no other. As the people of God they were exceptional. The dispute then between the man and Jesus turns on Jesus' interpretation of the identity of the Hebrew *re'aka* "your compatriot". Here's Jesus' predicament: if he does not interpret *re'aka* as a fellow Jew, he is no longer one of them. He is an apostate. If Jesus upholds the interpretation that *re'aka* is exclusive to Jews alone, he loses credibility among his following.

They have believed his teaching about the inclusive Kingdom of God which transcends the Law of Moses. His teaching would seem a charade to lure a following.

### The solution to Jesus' predicament

To resolve his dilemma, Jesus resorts to the parable, putting the onus of judgment on the hearer. He tells the parable of a Jew travelling to Jericho, who was robbed and left for dead on the highway. Two of his own people, custodians of the Law of Moses no less, treat him as untouchable and pass by on the other side. A Samaritan arrives, treats the man with tender care and at his own expense finds the injured Jew lodging till he heals. Jesus' choice of a Samaritan was deliberate and provocative.



Both interlocutor and all hearers must have recoiled at the mention of the word, Samaritan. Though of Jewish heritage, Samaritans were despised as half-breeds and heretics; lower than the Gentiles. They were apostates.

What irony: the Jew abandoned by his own is embraced by the outcast apostate, a Samaritan. "Which one of the three men do you think was *re'ak*, 'compatriot', to the injured man?" Jesus asks the custodian of the Law of Moses. Sheepishly the man admits, "The one who showed mercy." Though he cannot bring himself to utter the word Samaritan, the epitome of Jewish exceptionalism has vindicated Jesus.

Jesus was a Jew. That was his particular identity. Each one's ethnic, national, cultural and religious particularity has validity. But particularity must be distinguished from exclusivity. In the Kingdom of God, that is under God's rule, no single ethnic or religious community and no nation can lay claim to be exceptional. The inclusivity of the Kingdom of God accords parity to all. The other is also your own.

**Dr Basil Rebera, former Senior Coordinator for Bible Translation, United Bible Societies and Lecturer at the Presbytery's New Testament Studies Course.**

# What is the heart of Presbytery?



**The theme for this edition of *Perspective*, *The heart of the matter: from institution to movement, practising the faith*, has been prompted by the presentation of our guest, Mark Berry, at the Presbytery meeting just held.**

Mark's invitation is to rediscover the heart of our faith by exploring what he calls the New Monasticism.

Mark's invitation to consider, again, what it is that is at the heart of faith prompts me to ask: 'What is the heart of Presbytery?', 'What is Presbytery really about?'

After 33.5 years in ministry, 3.5 of which I have spent in my current role with our Presbytery, I have heard it all. And not all that I have heard is complimentary. I remember from the church of my childhood a particular member who would always bring his book of Regulations to every meeting of the, then Methodist, congregation in which I grew up. He drove everyone crazy!

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**If the purpose of Presbytery is that the mission of Christ might thrive in and through our congregations, what then do we need to do as a Presbytery to maximise the possibility that this might happen?**

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But regulations have a place as they attempt to specify the particular things that a Presbytery is responsible for. However defining specific responsibilities is not enough. Responsibilities can be lived out in a controlling or liberating manner. Regulations can be used to constrain and prevent things from happening just as much as they can be used to define the pathway by which things can happen. Regulations alone are largely value-less.

What is more important is the intent behind the Regulations. For this we turn to the Constitution which tells us: '*Presbytery ... shall stimulate and encourage the Congregations within the bounds, providing ... strengthening and assistance of one another and ... participation in wider aspects of the work of the Church.*'

**In other words:**

- Presbytery exists for the mission of Christ as it is lived out through the Congregations that form the Presbytery.
- Presbytery is not about controlling congregations.
- Presbytery is not about burdening congregations.
- Presbytery is not about draining the resources of congregations.

In recent months I have been pondering this very issue with respect to our own Presbytery.

If the purpose of Presbytery is that the mission of Christ might thrive in and through our congregations, what then do we need to do as a Presbytery to maximise the possibility that this might happen?

**Canberra Region has already taken steps to answer that question -**

- We have appointed staff (Geoff and myself) to focus on Mission, Education, Pastoral Care of Ministers and Administration.
  - We have office staff (Carolyn) to focus on Communications as well as supporting the other staff.
  - We have welcomed staff (Briony) from UnitingCare NSW/ACT to focus on Community Development.
  - We have changed the purpose and format of our Presbytery Meetings.
  - We have re-focussed our magazine, *Perspective*, to invite our members to consider specific issues and their impact on the mission of congregations.
- all of this to stimulate and encourage our Congregations.

Our Presbytery also appreciates the involvement of volunteers elected to our Pastoral Relations Committee, our Finance and Property Committee, and our Standing Committee.

Each ensures that the various responsibilities described in the Regulations are fulfilled with the well-being of the mission and ministry of our Congregations firmly the goal.

In spite of this it is easy for congregations to feel they are under threat because of the increasing compliance requirements that our church must follow.

It is easy to feel that the wider church seems to do little more than remind us we are failing to meet our obligations to support the church's wider work. It is easy to feel we are under the microscope, being assessed and judged because of our declining numbers or diminishing budgets.

Unfortunately, when these are the messages we hear it is easy to lose heart and become inward focussed, self-protecting and reluctant to trust that the Spirit of Christ can be living within and through us. When we live with negativity we lose all sense of adventure, courage and hope.

Even though we have taken some important steps to counter these feelings of threat, obligation and judgement, I suggest that we can take a further step to increase the confidence and faith of our congregations. I believe we need a Statement of Vision that makes it clear that the focus of our Presbytery is the health of the mission of Christ through our congregations.

I would like to offer the following statement as a beginning to a conversation about a motivating vision for our Presbytery.

### **Canberra Region Presbytery seeks to be a Presbytery in which:**

#### **a) Congregations**

- a. Know they are appreciated and valued as the first line of the mission of Christ in the Community;
- b. Are encouraged to seek the signs of the Spirit within them, calling them to authentic Christian community and mission that is appropriate to their context;
- c. Recognise they are part of a larger whole that is not a threat to them.

#### **b) Ministry Agents**

- a. Know they are appreciated and valued in their roles with congregations;
- b. Are encouraged to offer and receive support with colleagues;
- c. Recognise they have a key role in helping their congregations discover their authentic calling as Christ's people

#### **c) Presbytery Staff**

- a. Guide the Presbytery in considering future directions by looking for and responding to signs of the Spirit in timely and effective ways so as to "get on board" with what God might be doing in contexts we might not have expected;
- b. Grow the confidence of ministry agents, lay members, congregations by being available and present to the needs and opportunities that emerge in our Presbytery;
- c. Ensure that, in an age of increased compliance requirements, the decline in volunteer engagement does not hinder the effective business of the church.



Image: Brian Rope

#### **d) The Presbytery**

- is able to participate with other Presbyteries and the Synod as a whole in:

- a. discovering the call of God on our Church; and
- b. addressing the issues facing our church with transparency, trust and honesty.

#### **Feedback invited**

All Church Councils have been given this statement and have been asked to give feedback to add to the thoughts of the different Presbytery Committees.

Your discerning responses will also be warmly welcomed. It is my intention to bring a final proposal concerning this to the last meeting of Presbytery early in November.

In its final form this statement will guide us as we develop the ways in which we deploy our staff as they support our congregations and encourage our ministry agents.

In its final form this statement will make it clear that the ministry and mission of our congregations is our priority. In its final form this statement will name the spirit with which we intend to fulfil the responsibilities given to us.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to the future of our congregations. Over the next few years some will die after years of faithful service. Others will thrive. Yet others will continue in uncertainty. No matter where a congregation is in its life cycle it can still be a living expression of faith and love.

Encourage and nurture our congregations. This is the heart of the matter for our Presbytery. This is what our Presbytery is really about.

**Kevin Dilks**

**Presbytery Minister Pastoral and Administration.**

*PS: If you so wish you can go to the Assembly Website and explore the UCA Regulations at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/regulations>*



Image by Duncan MacLeod

# Hearts on Fire

*Presbytery Minister, Geoff Wellington, and Goulburn Uniting's Minister, Julie Furner, were Canberra Region Presbytery members of Hearts on Fire, the 14th Triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church. Geoff writes:*

**Snow was falling across parts of the Canberra Region Presbytery as people from across Australia gathered in sunny warm Perth for the Uniting Church's Assembly meeting in July.**

Some 350 people gathered at the University of Western Australia and were welcomed by local indigenous Uniting Church members. This welcome set the scene for the installation of the new President Mr Stuart McMillan, which was full of cultural and religious significance with Stuart being escorted through dance and song on to the stage to be installed. (photo below)

The Assembly meeting is a long, gruelling week of hearing and responding to proposals as well as reports across the diversity of the UCA. It is also a time of worshipping, studying and celebrating together as the UCA and alongside our "partner churches" and ecumenical friends.



Arnhem Land singers escorting the new President to the stage to be installed. Image by Duncan MacLeod

Together we considered over 50 proposals, received reports from the Assembly Agencies and elected people for the ongoing work of the Assembly over the next three years.

*For information about all the various proposals go to: <http://assembly2015.uca.org.au/proposals-and-reports/>*

## Uniting Islander and Christian Congress

This year marks thirty years since the establishment of the covenant between UCA/Uniting Islander & Christian Congress (UAICC or Congress) and the UCA's declaration of being a Multicultural Church.



Rohan Salmond, Liusem Mauboy, Jemma Whittaker promoting the National Young Adult Leaders Conference at the Gold Coast July 2016. Image: Duncan MacLeod

These two significant events, impacting the life of the Uniting Church more and more, played a big part in the Assembly meeting. UAICC brought a number of proposals to the Assembly including

- continuing the week of prayer and fasting initiated at the 2012 Assembly.
- seeking to setup a task group to progress the work and understanding of the covenant and the preamble to the UCA constitution in the life of the church.
- proposals relating to the recognition of first peoples in the Australian Constitution campaign, recognising there are different views within the UAICC about "recognition" and any support of a referendum proposal by the UCA would not preclude the seeking of recognition of first people's sovereignty in Australia or the need for a "treaty".

The Assembly moved by consensus the repudiation of the "Doctrine of Discovery" that allowed western European powers from the 15th century on to occupy land and do whatever they wanted to first peoples.



Marda Pitt launches an appeal for rebuilding Mapoon Uniting Church. Image: Duncan MacLeod

Condemnation of the closure of remote communities and the standing in solidarity with one of the Northern Congress groups around the “fracking” and extraction of coal seam gas of their land was another proposal. The photo above shows Marda Pitt launching an appeal for the rebuilding of the old Mapoon Uniting Church. This has come out of a long history of shameful disposition by a mining company, the burning down of the church building and much of the old town and the inaction on the part of the church at the time.

### Frontier Services

Assembly received a report and passed a number of proposals with a heavy heart around the work of Frontier Services. There has been and will continue to be much needed rebuilding of Frontier Services. This rebuilding has come at much pain and a lot of hard work for many. It is hoped that the future of Frontier Services is now much more secure and sustainable with the changes that have been put in place.

### Royal Commission

It was also with much sadness and pain that the Assembly was addressed by Justice Peter McClellan AM, Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. He informed the Assembly of some 399 cases involving the UCA of allegations of child sexual abuse. It is indeed very sobering to be confronted by the reality of the churches failing to protect children in its care. *Links are available for Justice McClellan’s presentation and the full transcript: <http://tinyurl.com/qfu8nah>; for more about the work of the commission or to see what response the UCA is making: <http://tinyurl.com/o77m9df>. Please seek help from your minister, presbytery staff, synod or Lifeline (131 114) if this raises issues for you.*



Assembly 2015 stands in solidarity with indigenous sisters and brothers.

Image by Duncan MacLeod

### Marriage

The report by the Doctrine Working group on “marriage” was accepted along with some basic proposals that enable the UCA to continue to be in dialogue across the breadth of the UCA and its diverse views on marriage. A report will come to the next Assembly that continues the work on the theology of marriage, developing liturgical resources in response to the report.

There will be some ecumenical conversations about the role of the church’s current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conducting of marriages. If there are any changes to the Commonwealth Marriage Act then pastoral letters will be sent out by the General Secretary giving advice to celebrants authorized by the Uniting Church.

### Yurora 2017

NCYC will again be held in Sydney January 15-19th 2017 and invitations to become involved in the planning and running of NCYC is underway. If you are interested in being part of this event go to the Yurora 2017 Face Book page <https://www.facebook.com/youryurora> there is currently heavy discounts on registration as well.



‘Love Makes a way’ veterans doing a stand-in at the break during assembly. Image: Duncan MacLeod

### UCA and Anglican Church

The Assembly endorsed an agreement with the Anglican Church called *Weaving a New Cloth*; a statement about areas of ministry that they can work together in.

### More proposals

There was a proposal removing the “Pastor B” pathway of lay ministry. Proposals to do with **Eldership, the recognition of the Armenian genocide and Palestinian Christians** were also worked on.

### A highlight

One of the highlights was engaging with Luke’s gospel story of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-25). On the fourth day Assembly members were invited to use the Lectio Divina practice, reading the text and sitting in silence to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

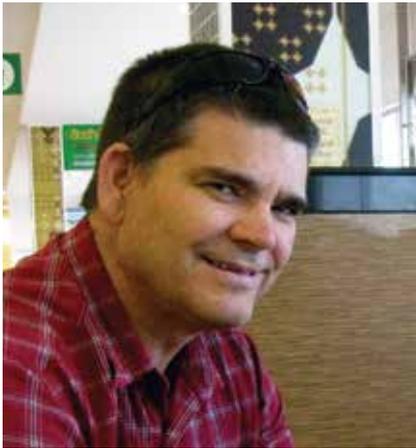
I have come home from Assembly after an 80 hour week plus other extra socialising activities totally exhausted. I am also inspired and excited by this Uniting Church we belong to in all its diversity and capacity to make a difference in peoples lives as we bear witness to the love and transforming work of Jesus Christ.

**Geoff Wellington**

**Presbytery Minister Mission and Education**

# The call to everyday living of the gospel

*“Jesus?” she questioned. “I don’t have any trouble with Jesus. It’s all the stuff that happened after Jesus that makes me mad.” (Diana Butler Bass. Loc 158. A People’s History of Christianity)*



It would seem that throughout history the shift from institution to movement and back to organisation, has plagued most societies. There have always been those who have called institutions back to the heart

of the matter. For it would appear that institutions regularly lapse into “amnesia” about their meaning and purpose and lose their way.

## Jesus as ‘prophet’

One lens through which people read the life of Jesus is that of “prophet”, the one who calls Judaism back to the heart of God. The story of the lawyer seeking to know the way to “eternal life” is a classic example of Jesus tapping into the heart of the matter; into a memory long held in the people’s social consciousness that the “fullness of life” resides in loving God fully and loving your neighbour as yourself (Luke 10: 25-37).

Jesus confronts the institution with the need to move back to the heart of the matter and practise the faith in life giving ways. This and other confrontations with the religious leaders of the day eventually led to Jesus’ crucifixion. We should be in no doubt as to the cost of “practising the faith”. But the heart of the matter is to practise the Christian faith in all aspects of our lives.

## The early church

The book of Acts paints a picture for us of the early Church “practising the faith”. It transformed the institution’s view of who was considered to be an “insider”. Women, men, children, Jew, Greek, slave and free were all included; a radical departure from the institution’s understanding. Communities of faith gathered around the sharing of goods and supporting individuals for the common good. The practice of hospitality and the sharing of the meal called to mind the story of Jesus’ teaching of the faith.

Crucially the practice of the faith for the early Church “was the spreading awareness of a faith that delivered potent antidotes to life’s miseries here and now.” (Diana Butler A People’s History of Christianity).

The early church understood the Christian faith as a way of living life in the reality of everyday existence but it wasn’t long before these groups started to put in place structures, rules and creeds. By the end of Roman emperor Constantine’s life (337AD), the Church and State had begun to work in partnership and the institution once again took over.

## But not all followed this path.

Some, like the Desert Fathers and Mothers, chose to ‘practise the faith’ through a rule of life that included prayer, hospitality, the discipline of a simple life and good works towards others; the start of what the Church now refers to as Monasticism.

Through the ages individuals and groups have sought to practise the faith in this way. One such group, the ‘Beguines’ in the 12th & 13th Century, were an order of lay women who lived together, wore simple habits, practised the hours (regular prayer) and vowed simplicity and service. They practised “charity” by educating girls, clothing the poor, visiting the sick, caring for the dying and speaking out against the social order of the day. The Beguines practised their Christian faith in real everyday ways that transformed people’s lives and lived out the interests of God.

It seems that there is a common thread throughout history that whenever institutions lose touch with the meaning and purpose of their existence, movements arise that bring them back to the heart of the matter; in the Church’s case, to the core “practice of the faith”: loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves.

## Heart of the matter - today

In our own time the Church’s reliance on institutional influence to engage people in the practice of the Christian faith is treated with deep and justified suspicion in the eyes of society. Likewise blind trust in political ideology and institutions that once supported civil society is well gone.

Calls like Mark Berry’s, for institutions to shift back towards being a ‘movement’ and to the practice of faith through a ‘new monasticism’, are gathering pace.

.../continued on the next page

# Affordable housing

## *a basic need that is also core business*

### **This year congregations in the NSW and ACT Synod have arranged small group conversations about affordable housing.**

For some of these congregations it has been unusual for church meetings to discuss economic and social issues, especially if they are politically sensitive. Unusual perhaps, but we believe that talking and acting on this issue is the mission of the church. It is core business.

Without safe, secure and affordable housing it is hard to find and keep a good job, raise and educate children or feel part of a community. For the past two decades house prices in Australia have been rising faster than incomes, so that buying a home is now beyond the reach of more Australians. Rents have been rising fast too.

In Canberra, median weekly rent for a three bedroom detached home is about \$450; a two bedroom apartment \$390. By comparison the weekly gross minimum wage is \$640; the pension with rent assistance just over \$400.

### **Why is it that so many Australians cannot access affordable housing?**

There are many reasons. Politicians favour steadily rising property values because this keeps business and property owners happy. There are significant constraints on the supply of land for housing; community resistance to denser development; cash-strapped governments maximising the price they get for subdividing crown land and hence rationing supply. For many years governments have under-invested in public and community housing.

Why should the church get involved? Simply because it is a matter of justice. Our concern for our neighbour, for strong families and communities demands that the church interest itself in the housing of Australians.



*.../continued from the previous page*

The Uniting Church is well aware of this shift in society and is trying to come to terms with a changing landscape while recognising that “good ordering” is a necessity for the well being of any movement. However getting back to the practical everyday living of the gospel is where we are being called as a church. Across our Canberra Region Presbytery there are many congregations practising their faith through practical support of those on the margins of society; loving our neighbour as ourselves.

That can mean advocacy but the church can also help directly through better use of its property holdings.

In our own Presbytery some congregations have been doing just that.

- **St Columba's in Braddon**, with its Safe Shelter project, is maximising utilisation of a church hall as a safe warm place for homeless men to sleep on selected nights. Demand is growing – 58 guests hosted until 1 August 2015, compared with 30 in the same period in 2014.
- **South Woden in Pearce**, working with Canberra Refugee Support, has made available its manse, not currently required for a minister, to a refugee family at a rental rate lower than a commercial tenancy.
- **St Margaret's in Hackett**, with the support of UnitingCare, Housing ACT and the Commonwealth Government, in 2011 established Ross Walker Lodge – offering independent living for people with disabilities.

These are examples of congregations using their property to progress the mission of the church. Last year's Special Issue of 'Insights': *Property for a Pilgrim People*, identified many such examples. More opportunities remain, including in our Presbytery, where manses, other buildings and vacant land can be put to alternate uses.

### **Have a conversation in your congregation**

Whether it be through advocacy or better stewardship of your property, your church might be able to help other Australians find decent and affordable housing. We think that would amount to core business, the mission of the church.

**Presbytery Social Justice Group Convenor: Evan Mann**  
[evan.mann\[at\]netspeed.com.au](mailto:evan.mann[at]netspeed.com.au)

Mark Berry's visit will be an opportunity to consider how a focus on the spiritual practices of faith can inform and nurture our practical actions; loving God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.

In other words getting to the heart of the matter is the very practical substance of practising our Christian faith. It would be good to consider how you personally, as well as your faith community, goes about “practising” both of these elements at the heart of the matter.

**Geoff Wellington**

**Presbytery Minister (Mission & Education)**

# Turning Outward

## Core business of the Church



**It has been said to me on many an occasion and with reference to different congregations that they are “really inward-focussed” – meaning that the congregation is focussed on themselves...**

**and perhaps their own survival or their traditions.**

Yet core business for the Uniting Church has always included looking beyond itself to help others.

Increasingly, congregations are being encouraged, and sometimes challenged, to ‘Turn Outwards’.

### **But what does Turning Outwards<sup>1</sup> mean?**

Turning outwards means to change your orientation, your posture, the very direction you face, and the work we do. It means to make the choice to face toward the community, to squarely address reality, and to see and hear all people.

It means that if we want to see change in our community, and we want to see the Church having a role in that change, we need to look outside ourselves, and often times, outside our Sunday walls. The key to having greater impact in our community and staying true to ourselves is to Turn Outward.

### **But what is the context for this?**

If your congregation is worried about whether there will be people sitting in the pews in 20 years’ time, this applies to you. If your congregation is passionate about social justice and wants to see change in your local community, this applies to you.

If your congregation is already involved in community activities, this applies to you. If your congregation feels worried about issues but has no idea where to start, then this applies to you.

Turning outward applies to most of us as individuals, as Church members, as community members, and collectively as congregations.

Because, as we try to get things done in our community, we can face incredible pressure to turn inward – to focus more on our own organization and its internal workings, the very survival of our organization, the Sunday service, and endless to-do lists. But the more inward we become, the harder it is to create the change we seek.

### **How is turning outward core business?**

The Synod Mission Plan 2015-2017 has as its vision: “Moving with God, Transforming Communities” Within the Plan, six areas are articulated as being key to the Life of the Church – or core business. The fourth of these is Service.

We will serve the common good by more intentionally responding to the call of Jesus to serve others. However, if you are always looking inward you may have great impact on those few whom you are facing, but your reach will be limited. Looking inwards does of course have its place. It can mean contemplation, reflection and prayer. It can also mean intentional discernment – individually, in small groups or whole of congregation.

In order to turn outwards, it is important to have spent time in discernment such that, as a congregation, each member has a genuine sense of the call that is being placed upon them – the vision, the mission, and the core values that guide core business.

### **Queanbeyan’s Discernment Program**

In 2014, the Queanbeyan Uniting Church undertook a new discernment program that built on a 2008 process which developed the congregation’s *Philosophy of Ministry and Mission*. Led by the Worship and Discipleship Task Group, the program was designed and resourced to guide the congregation as members and corporately in a process of intentionally seeking and discerning God’s call.

The program was broken into stages which sat alongside the Liturgical Easter Calendar.

**Stage 1 (Lenten Session)** was focused on listening for and discerning the call. Members asked “Where is God?” whilst reflecting intentionally upon their relationship with God and recognising and affirming the skills, knowledge and experiences that they bring to the process. This stage focused primarily on individuals taking the time to reflect upon themselves and where they experience God. The process ran over seven weeks, culminating with individual ministry profiles and a sense of one’s “God-given passion”.

1 “Turning outward” is a step-by-step process developed by The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. <http://www.theharwoodinstitute.org/how-to-turn-outward/>



*A typical Queanbeyan Uniting Church Garden Group meeting  
Image courtesy of Natalie Maras*

**Stage 2 (After Easter)** was focused on encountering the resurrected Christ in their lives, their community, and each other. It encouraged people to develop their understanding of themselves as Christian disciples, and enabled both the church and the individual to discern better individual gifts and graces for ministry and the type of ministry in which these gifts and graces may be expressed. The Queanbeyan process was intentionally inward-focused. As a result of this though, individuals have identified others in the congregation who share interests and a common passion for turning outward. Interest groups have formed and these are intrinsic in what is now seen as core business for the church.

The **Community Garden Group** is an example of a group willing to turn outward while aiming to renovate the church gardens in order to attract, inspire and nurture the congregation and local community. The group has steadily grown since the discernment process and has clearly articulated how the activities of the group will connect with God and the wider community – especially in the areas of prayer, hospitality, and justice. You can read more about this group in the Aug/Sept edition of NSW.ACT Synod's magazine, *Insights*.

Another interest group that is turning outward is the **Homelessness Group** with a passion for making best use of available resources to support those who find themselves without shelter. They are working in partnership with St Benedict's Community Day Centre to provide emergency shelter up to three nights per week in an under-utilised church hall.

The model, tailored to the local context, builds on the experience of the ACT Safe Shelter at St Columba's Uniting Church, Braddon.

Having generated from the discernment process, the interest groups at Queanbeyan Uniting Church are faith expressions of the Vision for the church – and hence faith expressions of core business. These examples are about transforming communities by turning outwards.

**Briony Griffiths**

**UnitingCare Community Development Co-ordinator**

**To explore a change in orientation**

If your congregation would like to explore how its orientation might change to face the community, contact Briony Griffiths, Community Development Coordinator, [bgriffiths\[at\]unitingcare.nswact.org.au](mailto:bgriffiths@unitingcare.nswact.org.au) or attend the upcoming conference hosted by Uniting Mission & Education.

**Transforming Communities Conference  
24-28 August 2015 - Uniting Mission & Education**

A five day conference designed to build capacity in leadership, community organising, community restoration, creative learning and formation of multicultural communities, designed for Uniting Church leaders, staff, board and council members, congregation members and other interested people. You can attend all events or decide which days you will attend. Check it out: <http://ume.nsw.uca.org.au/event/transforming-communities-conference/>

# Presbytery has a mission and a purpose

## A MOVEMENT OR AN INSTITUTION?

The Church is both Institution and Movement.

An institution values the good ordering of its structures.

A movement values inspiration, education and information.

Canberra Region Presbytery seeks to encourage the Movement.

### 1. Relational Oversight

All of the functions of Presbytery are dependent upon the key factor of the Presbytery having relational oversight\* for those congregations within its bounds. This is not oversight as exercising power or control but a relational way of being where the gathered members of the Uniting Church are cared for and working together to fulfil their call to discipleship in Jesus Christ.

\*Relational Oversight is the focused care that a council or person has for another that involves ensuring they keep the faith of the church, are given support and encouragement for ministry and are held accountable for faith and action.

### 2. Gathering for Inspiration and Education and Communicating Encouragement

The Presbytery Meetings held quarterly on a Saturday give priority to feeding the Movement.

It is the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment at work in this meeting which sets it apart and gives it a distinct ethos.

Each meeting has a particular educational/missional focus (eg What does the ministry of Chaplaincy have to say to the mission of congregations? How are we to engage with the Government's policy on Indigenous Issues? How do we focus on the heart of our faith? etc) These morning sessions are focussed on presentations and table conversations around a theme and are a means of building relationship and giving a sense of vision.

The morning gathering is open to full participation by everyone who chooses to attend.

Those attending are encouraged to spread the word about what is discussed.

In recognition that the Presbytery has institutional responsibilities the time after lunch is devoted to more formal business.

Regional Meetings are a new initiative to supplement the Presbytery Meetings.

### 3. Communication Strategy

The quarterly magazine *Perspective* offers to all members the presentations from the morning session of the Presbytery gathering and reflections on the theme from the Presbytery Ministers, Chairperson and others to help keep everyone connected.

reVision, an email newsletter, is emailed to Presbytery Reps and Council Secretaries summarising the feedback from table responses; queries are followed up and the conversation continues.

The weekly notices are sent out to all congregations for distribution to members as appropriate.

*This is a page from the paper, "Canberra Region Presbytery - An Introduction", which forms part of an information pack handed out to Church Council office-bearers, ministry agents and lay leaders attending Regional gatherings, a new initiative to supplement the quarterly Presbytery meetings.*

*So far we have held one in Bega for the coastal congregations and one in Goulburn for northern congregations. The next one on the 29th August 2015 will be held at Queanbeyan for congregations in the ACT, Queanbeyan, Monaro and Alpine area.*

*Read more about regional gatherings in Vanessa's article on page 4.*

# Meeting people where they are

**The more I read about the new monasticism, the more it sounds familiar to me.**

I have said before, something we did or said in the 40s, 50s and 60s has led a whole generation of people out of community...but not necessarily away from God. They just feel that the churches somehow should have behaved better than they did on social justice issues and on inter-personal relationships.

So the reality of my experience is companionship people who have not stepped inside a church since the last christening or funeral and with no plans to do so.

They don't want to debate scripture. They don't want me to make them feel guilty for their 'absence'. They need a lifeline to help make meaning of what is happening to them and affirmation that God has not abandoned them – even if they have been too busy sometimes to affirm the almighty.

There's nothing monastic about stopping and dwelling in the spirit but it's nice to have a title. Service in the love of God is another way to look at it. To love God, love yourself and love others describes both the needs of patients and families as well as the pastoral carers.

## Here's what we do.

We have ecumenical church services. What is that? If you are looking for someone to dot all the 'I's, you won't find it here. While the morning service is 'badged' Uniting Church in Australia, the emphasis is 'come as you are' and all are welcome. We try and make meaning rather than ritual yet aim for something deeply sacred.

There is a mixture of warmth and invitation with worship that is not steeped in dogma. We have an emphasis on God's loving nature and Jesus' inclusive mission. We use new and old materials – old so that something is familiar and new so that people can hear afresh. We need to go beyond the predictable and surprise listeners. The morning communion is inclusive – no ifs; no questions.

Unpredictably, the majority of 'visitors' to our morning service do not come from a UCA tradition. Yet, time and time again, they look at our leaders with wonder and say, 'it's been 20 years since I've had communion.'

Lately I have taken to calling the afternoon service 'Pub in the church' because it is timed to coincide with the end of nurses' shifts. In the olden days, we used to have a break between work and home obligations. That has mostly disappeared.



Jean Shannon, UCA Deacon and Hospital Chaplaincy Co-ordinator. For resources and ways to help, see Jean's webpage: [canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/hospital-chaplaincy/](http://canberraregion.unitingchurch.org.au/hospital-chaplaincy/)

So when do non-church-going people have sacred moments? Moments to turn into themselves and check, 'how am I going?'...and, 'where's God in my life today?'

That's why our afternoon service is more like a meditation. It takes place in the round. There is a gong and silence, there's beautiful music to relax to and usually one Taize or John Bell style song to sing. A song that is simple and lives in its repetition. Sometimes there is scripture or a psalm – sometimes a poem or a story. Often these are read in many voices – sometimes repeated after a silence. All of these materials are meant to be a well from which we can draw life and hope.

## When not 'doing' services

the UCA pastoral carers and volunteers are listening to patients at their bedsides talk about the things that matter to them; wondering aloud what all this means; and, explaining and asking about spiritual things. Sometimes we lead them in guided meditation to ease the pain; sometimes we offer communion or pray with them and sometimes, we just sit in silence. Sitting in silence together is a very intimate thing... and somehow, God feels closer too.

Just as we go to their bedsides, we also travel with them on the trail of their illness...often, to the end. One of the chaplaincy's greatest privileges is when I get to lead families in saying goodbye. It is sad but fulfilling to know the wishes the patient has expressed over the years are piloted through their leaving and funeral. It is sad that so many people are buried by strangers. The intimacy of chaplaincy helps relieve this. We can lead others in saying goodbye to someone we genuinely know. It makes it harder and yet, more joyful and God-filled. It is a relief to the families to have someone who 'understands' the special nature of their loved one's spiritual life. One size does not fit all.

So bring on the new Monasticism. Pastoral carers are ready!

*Jean Shannon, Hospital Chaplaincy Co-ordinator.*



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