



VIEWPOINT

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Canberra Bushfires Twentieth Anniversary



As we remember the events of 18 January 2003, when 470 Canberra homes were destroyed by fire and four people died, we pray for everyone affected by these terrible events, for those who are still traumatised by the memory and loss, and for authorities who have sought to learn lessons.



Indigenous Acknowledgement



Celebrating the incarnation of Christ at Christmas recognises the presence of God in our world. The Spirit of Truth and Love has informed the lives of Indigenous Australian people since time immemorial. In this painting, **The Gift**, by the Rev. Robyn Davis, we see that dreaming tracks connect earth and heaven, encompassing and enfolding the elements of the story of Christ in the cradle within the love of the Creator, under the light of the guiding star. Rev Robyn Davis is a member of the Waddi Waddi people and assistant priest in the Anglican parish of Swan Hill in northern Victoria.

Canberra Region Presbytery acknowledges the people of the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, Ngarigo, Yuin, and Gundungurra peoples, custodians from time immemorial of the lands on which we worship, serve and witness.



From the Editor

Our world is burdened with anxiety and trauma. In our Summer Viewpoint edition, Rev Ross Kingham tells of the trauma of the loss of his home twenty years ago to the 2003 Canberra bushfires, a horrific experience that continues to live with him and his family. As so many people deal with various traumas – flood, war, poverty, violence, injustice, fire – we pray for the loving presence of Jesus Christ in our world. Jesus is a source of comfort and truth and values, our guiding star, inspiring us for peace, reconciliation, love and improvement. May our faith be a source of healing and vision and community. Viewpoint Magazine offers a forum for members of the Uniting Church to share reflections on our faith. Contributions are always welcome. In this issue we celebrate the 150th anniversary of St Ninian’s Uniting Church in Lyneham, hear some perspectives on climate change and the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, and share the vision of mission for our Presbytery. Please let me know if you wish to contribute.

In Christ

Robbie Tulip

CRP Secretary and Viewpoint Editor

Advocacy for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament

Robbie Tulip

The establishment of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament by Federal Referendum this year offers the prospect of significant advance in action on the many challenges facing Australia’s Indigenous peoples. Achieving a successful outcome in the national vote is crucial to building trust and reconciliation, supporting efforts to fully engage and empower Indigenous communities in defining and agreeing their priorities to solve their problems. The placement of the Voice within the Constitution has both symbolic and practical meaning, serving to recognise and respect the human dignity and equality of First Nations people.

As Indigenous leader Noel Pearson recently commented, rather than being distracted by side issues, we should focus on the main question of how voting Yes for Constitutional recognition will support reconciliation. Recognising the scale of trauma and suffering and injustice that Indigenous people have endured, and how these historic realities contribute to ongoing violence and exclusion, the cultural dialogue supported by the Voice to Parliament will give a new prominence and respect and clarity to efforts to remedy these problems and strengthen national cohesion.

A successful referendum needs support from the broader Australian community through grassroots community discussion and understanding, countering misinformation and scare campaigns from opponents. Questions that have been raised can readily be answered. For example, Constitutional recognition of an Indigenous advisory body will advance the ability to legislate on how the Voice should operate. There needs to be an assumption of trust and good will to improve Indigenous conditions and status. Sadly, this trust is lacking in some arguments in the public debate.

The tone of some criticism of the referendum reflects a concealed continuity to colonial-era racial attitudes. As we seek justice for Indigenous people today, we need to recognise these historical



failings, and how historic exclusion continues to affect present day conditions and beliefs. Remember that the 1967 Referendum removed Section 127 from the Constitution which had stated “In reckoning the numbers of people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.” Such deliberate racial exclusion has enduring impacts that a Yes vote now will help to remedy.

Australian church leaders have supported the Voice in a [Joint Resolution](#), recognising that community consensus across divides of faith, tradition and belief to fulfil the Uluru Statement can bring Australians together and can unite groups across the community.

Noel Pearson discussed some of the main questions about the Voice in his recent [Boyer Lectures on ABC Radio National](#). He expressed support for the Voice to focus on immediate practical problems. In his third Boyer Lecture, Noel Pearson said “Witness the rolling back of alcohol bans in the Northern Territory and Queensland, both instigated by the left on the basis of lofty principles with little regard to the practical realities in many communities. Is there a better

example of why local communities need a constitutionally guaranteed say in decisions made about them? Those decisions should have been undertaken in true partnership with local communities. That is what a constitutionally guaranteed voice is intended to ensure.” This call to include local views helps to indicate the practical need for the Voice. Noel Pearson also commented that the original denial of Indigenous recognition, seen in the Terra Nullius doctrine and its associated genocidal practices, was based on the dominant settler view that race relations were part of a war of conquest that systematically excluded Indigenous rights.

The Uniting Church has a responsibility to encourage its members to discuss the Voice Referendum, opening conversation with people who may be influenced by arguments to vote against it. The Canberra Region Presbytery Social Justice Group sees advocacy for the Voice as a primary concern for 2023, and encourages all members of the church to actively promote a Yes vote. The Social Justice Group would welcome suggestions of how to take this forward. Possible actions include through meetings of churches and the Presbytery, including support for broader ecumenical and social discussion. The Social Justice Group will place information on the Voice debate in the weekly Presbytery notices and future Viewpoints in the months leading up to the referendum.

Embracing the Uluru Statement From The Heart through support for the Voice will enrich Australian culture, our sense of ourselves as a people and our connection with the continent, recognising the

Australian Church Leaders Joint Resolution, 26 May 2022

On this day in 2017, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples came together at Uluru and asked Australians to walk with them towards a better future.

Through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Indigenous Australians asked for constitutional recognition through a constitutionally guaranteed voice in their own affairs.

As leaders representing diverse religious communities, we declare our support of the Uluru Statement and its call for a First Nations Voice guaranteed by the Constitution.

We endorse this reform as necessary, right and reasonable.

Indigenous Australians must be now afforded their rightful place in the Australian Constitution.

There have been many processes and much work completed.

The one thing left to do is let the Australian people have their say.

We call on political leaders to take immediate bipartisan action to hold a referendum on a First Nations Voice.

lack of bitterness and indeed the generosity the Uluru Statement displays to the rest of us. There is a strong Biblical basis for the Voice, notably in the statement at Matthew 25:40 that what we do to the least of the world we do to Christ.

I regularly read *The Australian* newspaper, which has featured arguments for and against the Voice. The Australian [published this letter from me](#) on 10 November.

Voice of reason

“The concepts of reconciliation, recognition and respect raised in the dialogue on the Indigenous Voice are essentially religious and spiritual in nature. Much Australian secular politics tends to see religion as unimportant or meaningless, and yet throughout history religion has been central to social cohesion and identity. The SBS television documentary [The Australian Wars](#) revealed major issues of genocide that remain an unacknowledged stain on the national character. The Voice will help Australia to atone for the sins of colonial settlement, with the grievous loss of Indigenous culture and population. Asserting that Australia has no problem of national guilt reinforces harmful social division. The Voice will promote constructive dialogue. Saying a constitutional mandate will unfairly distort political processes misses the point of this referendum as an essential step on the national journey of healing.”

The link is behind a paywall, so only subscribers to *The Australian* can see it. Most subscribers are quite conservative. This has led to the discussion in the newspaper online comments section being quite different from what you might expect from a cross section of the community, as those who are willing to pay to read *The Australian* tend to share the values of the paper.

I have compiled the responses from the comments section to help illustrate the vehemence of the opposition, which is still a minority view according to opinion polls but could well influence enough undecided people to harm the success of the referendum. [This link](#) shows the online comments made in direct response to my letter, with the number of “likes” from readers. The responses start with the most popular, in descending order. There were no comments supporting the Voice. The common theme is that the Indigenous Voice to Parliament is totally wrong and that modern Australia has nothing to atone for regarding treatment of Indigenous people. I provide these comments here to help people understand how conservative voters think about race relations in Australia, and the challenges of community dialogue to advance the status and conditions of Indigenous people. Obviously, there is risk that sharing these comments gives them oxygen, but some people may be unaware of these attitudes, so discussing them can be a constructive way to counter them.

I responded to these comments as follows:

“The range of questions about the Voice to Parliament present legitimate and respectable perspectives and concerns. However, the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous Australians have suffered, together with their unique cultural heritage linked to our country from time immemorial, and the harm caused by the violent loss of this heritage, all mean that specific actions are still needed to recognise and honour and improve their contribution to Australian life. A compassionate response is needed to the perception that indigenous voices have not been adequately heard.



“A Yes vote in the Voice referendum can help enable the conversation to move ahead in a positive way, reinforcing rather than harming national unity and cohesion. Concerns about the potential power of the voice are misplaced, as are worries about eligibility to vote for it. Given that the Voice was identified in a spirit of generosity as the first priority of the Uluru process, rejection of it is unwise. The whole purpose is to shine a stronger moral light upon the problems of indigenous disadvantage, and to recognise the enduring damage of past overt institutional racism. Enabling more systematic and accountable scrutiny to improve government policies that affect Aborigines is hardly a danger.

We should expect that the Voice will bring both practical and symbolic benefits. Honesty about the dire situation for Indigenous people can combine with honesty about the shameful history of white Australian disdain for indigenous culture and rights. I believe we should aim for what Prime Minister John Howard once called “a better balance between pride in our past and recognition of past wrongs.” I agree with the need to celebrate national achievements. At the same time, we should be ashamed of the ignorant brutality of our settler forebears, heedlessly sweeping away ancient traditions and destroying priceless cultural heritage.

Language about atonement certainly is outside our normal discussions. The Voice offers hope that we can progress toward being at one as a nation, providing a forum supported by our highest law to enable honest and open conversation.”

St Ninian’s Uniting Church 1873 - 2023

‘The little stone church on the Yass Road’ will celebrate its 150 years Anniversary on Sunday 12 February 2023 at 9.30am. We would like to welcome past members, descendants of past members and all friends of St Ninian’s to join us for this very special occasion. The Service will commence at 9.30am and will be followed by refreshments and a time for reunion and reflection. St Ninians is at the corner of Mouat and Brigalow Streets in Lyneham ACT.



History of St Ninians

In 1840 the British Government ceased the transportation of convicts to the colony of NSW and Charles Campbell, the manager of Duntroon, soon found that, apart from a few convicts and itinerant bush workers, labour was very scarce. He provided passage for shepherds and their families from Scotland to come and work the property, and in the early 1850s a second wave of settlement brought free settlers who would go on to establish wheat and sheep properties. In later years these pioneer families and their descendants would become the nucleus of the Presbyterian Church in North Canberra.

In 1863 a small wooden church was built near the site and in 1873 this was replaced by a new church, built of local stone quarried on Black Mountain, and was consecrated on 13 February 1873. The resulting church was an outstation of the Queanbeyan charge. The church became the regular



place of worship for families from Weetangera and Ginninderra as well as those from Canberra, and so the little stone church on the Yass Road embarked on its pilgrimage.

The church's annual tea meetings appear to have been a much-anticipated community event and were not confined to Presbyterians. Methodists, Anglicans and Catholics all came to share in the social activities. A gigantic tea would be served in the church from two rows of tables, extending the whole length of the building. After tea there would be a lecture often with magic lantern pictures and a group of singers would provide extra entertainment.

The popular annual tea meetings continued and reports in the Goulburn Penny Post and the Queanbeyan Age speak of other tea meetings when 'three times the tables were filled with hungry guests who filled themselves with the good things under which the tables groaned'.

While it was in its heyday in the late 19th Century and plans were made to extend the little stone building by 50%, the economic downturn in the early 1890s and the devastating drought of 1895 – 1903 hit the farming community hard. Nevertheless the enlargement did take place, using the same rough stone from Black Mountain, and was duly completed and dedicated on 27 October 1901 by Rev W Gould of Goulburn.

The selection of Canberra in 1908 as the site for the national capital had far reaching effects for the district. In 1911 the Federal Government began to resume the land within the Territory boundary from its freehold owners and that continued between 1913 and 1917. Many of the local landholders left the district rather than take a lease on the property they had formerly owned. A notice of resumption of the church land was received in 1911 and at a meeting in July 1920 the Queanbeyan Committee of Management carried the motion that 'the Canberra building would not be required by us after 1 September 1920'. This, at the time, must have felt like the end of the road for the little stone church on the Yass road, it was left neglected and derelict.

In 1940 Rev Hector Harrison, the recently inducted minister of St Andrew's, was driving along the new Barton Highway, noticed the little stone church and started making enquiries about it and its history. The building was in a desperate state of disrepair but the structure was sound and Hector Harrison, realising its potential, decided to attempt to repair the building and restore it as a place of worship. The restored building was re-opened at a service in February 1942, under the charge of St Andrew's. From this time onward a monthly service was held at St Ninian's, the name chosen by Hector Harrison, surely the perfect choice, to link the resurrected little church with Scotland's first saint and his little stone church, and our little church resumed its pilgrimage. A Pioneers' Memorial Garden, consisting of a low stone wall and three square stone planters, was created in memory of its Scottish founders. In 1957 St Ninian's elected its own Board of Management and became a charge in its own right.

In 1977 St Ninian's congregation voted to become part of the new Uniting Church in Australia. In 1978-79 the six sided extension on the western end of the church was constructed, using the same rough stone from Black Mountain as the original building.

In 2018 St Ninian's entered into a symbiotic relationship with the Benedictus Contemplative Church, which has provided a 'home' for Benedictus and an opportunity for St Ninian's to move forward in engaging with the wider community. Landscaping of the site is now underway to help create a spiritual hub, the Waterhole project, where members of the community can feel safe and welcome. The pilgrimage continues!

For over 149 years the little stone church has stood foursquare on the Limestone Plains; of drought and fire and flood it's seen plenty, its fortunes have ebbed and flowed along with those of the people who built it, who have loved it and who continue to love it. It has offered sanctuary and strength, peace and encouragement to countless numbers of worshippers, and a continuing pioneering spirit to those of us fortunate enough to call it 'our church'.



Some Coming Events



Journeying with John travelling through Lent with the fourth Gospel

Online Bible Study – The Gospel of John with Tuggeranong Uniting Church
Every Thursday in Lent - [Link](#)

Ecumenical Service for Opening of Parliament

7:30am Monday 6 February

St Paul's Anglican Church, 70 Canberra Avenue, Griffith ACT

Preacher: Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard

Hosted by Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and ACT Churches Council

Uniting World's Lent Event

Lent Event seeks to help us refocus our lives through prayer, simplicity and generosity.
In 2023, Lent is from 22 February to 6 April.

Pray - Use our prayer guide to pray alongside our partners as they address the challenges facing their communities.

Live simply - Give up something in solidarity with people who have less.

Give - Donate or fundraise to help our partners fighting poverty and injustice.

See <http://www.lentevent.com.au>





'Chaos: Facing Fear And Terror'

An invitation to theological reflection by Rev Dr Ross Kingham

Chaos. How we have reeled at the unfolding tragedy in the Ukraine in the aftermath of the Russia's invasion. Untold hundreds of individuals and subsets of family units plunged into chaos.

Then again, we love movies and stories that include the elements of fear and terror; it adds zest to an otherwise monochrome existence; we are absorbed into it in the lives of others and in world events that take on the shape of the extraordinary.

But we do not like it erupting in our own life!

Hagar meets an angel at the fringes of the desert wilderness (Gen 16); Moses and Elijah each see God from a tiny cave on Mt Horeb (Ex 33; 1 Kings 19) ... such as these find God as they stand at the edge of life and at the brink of despair. This may be where God's presence is most easily to be found.

Consider a time of your own personal chaos...physical, psychological, spiritual, or relational.

Name it. Consider that "what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly" (Richard Bach, Illusions). This naming may be incredibly difficult to do. Some writers refer to 'difficulty of access': cutting through description (where it is so easy for us to get enthralled and over-excited to the point of missing the meaning) to emotional/spiritual impact. This 'difficulty of access' is represented, for example, in the physically arduous settings of many shrines and sacred places.

Enter into it. Reflect on the idea that "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious" (C J Jung)

Frame it. When did it occur, what preceded it, what followed on? Incidentally, one possible reason many people find solace in a shrine, or in a religious symbol, is that the desire to go back to places of past struggle, where our ancestors also had their backs to the wall and were hard-pressed, leads to the discovery of new insight, new wisdom. Our 'framing' may be aided by focussing on other, historical, frames. Many of these are to be found in biblical stories

Locate it. Where is that chaotic experience - at the forefront of your mind? almost forgotten? healed? festering?

Trauma of the Fires.

January 18, 2003 was a day set in a series of days of fierce heat, low humidity and high winds across southeast Australia. It was the day when 500 homes were destroyed in the ACT by a firestorm with winds estimated to be around 200kms ph. Our home was one of them.

No-one in our family was burned; no-one in our family died. Even so, when my wife and I found, after several





hours, that we and our children were all accounted for, I had little appreciation of the profound effect that day was to have on our health and our future.

The morning after the firestorm we began by finding temporary accommodation and purchasing the basic necessities of life – toothbrushes, toothpaste, underwear etc. In the days to follow, we raked through the ashes of our home, finding some coins, jewellery, pottery, just a few precious symbols of life and love.

Many friends have commented on the loss of our home, of most of our possessions. Few have any clear appreciation of the trauma behind the loss, the experience of knowing that at any moment hundreds of people could have died, the apocalypse-like scenes of the streets, of our street. Deep darkness, screaming wind, fires breaking out on the parched lawns and the tan-bark at our feet as if ignited by pools of petrol, the inability to hear the screams of people close by, the decision to try to escape by car, leaving most of our photograph albums in our second car; the choked streets, choked with traffic, with burning embers, with fear. Our feelings of utter vulnerability and powerlessness. There remained the obvious myriad of relocation issues to do with finding a new home, and settling into it (after two temporary homes early in 2003) and the after-effects of post-traumatic stress.

INTERRUPTION ... evolution of meaning

When chaos strikes, there is an interruption to our normal life-flow: something completely from the blue has intruded and disrupted our living. It may be the case that there is never any real closure concerning life-changing disasters, there is only a change to the meaning of such events. Dr Rob Gordon, Melbourne psychologist, *Canberra Times*, January 15, 2005, commenting on the Canberra fires of January 18 2003, wrote “as the years go by, the meaning of the event develops and changes....there is no real closure in these big life events, they just slowly evolve in their meaning”.

There is no return to the emotional and spiritual state that existed before the trauma. You never ‘get over’ such wounds in the sense that you can return to the same state as before. As with Jacob wrestling with God at the Brook Jabbok in Genesis 32, there remains a scar, a limp, reminders of the painful episode. Some people who experience burnout seek to return to the same condition of health as before the burnout: such a dream is a fantasy. Rather, the search may best be described as a seeking after the God-planted seeds of wisdom that come amidst the trauma.

Finding and celebrating your own pattern

Religious life is largely shaped by laws, expectations, rules. However, the ironic truth is that the great myths show us that when you follow somebody else’s pattern, you go astray: the hero has to set off by him/herself and must venture into the darkness of the unknown where there is no map and no clear route.

It sometimes happens that, as a reaction to trauma, we fall back on a form of legalist principles to comfort us in the terror.

In 1883, Mt Krakatoa erupted, at 10.02am, Monday 27th August in an island group in Java. Waves 30 metres above normal sea-level, along with tidal waves of ash and gas, killed 36,000 people. Between 1883 and 1888, a series of rebellions broke out against the Dutch (who aided in the relief efforts after the eruption). These rebellions had not only political, but also religious influence, described by Simon Winchester, in *The Day the World Exploded*. Islam became strong enough to dictate at least some of the major political events of the period. “Particularly amongst the unusually pious people of Banten , ... (we see) the beginning of militant and anti-Western Islamic movements...fundamentalist, militant, anti-colonial, anti-infidel Muhammedanism”. Islam had been first introduced by Arab traders in the 13th century. East Indian Islam was always of a much milder stripe than that practised in the Middle East and in Africa. The leader of the new, militant Islam of the 1870’s and 1880’s was



Hajji Abdul Karim. He predicted before the eruption of Krakatoa that the Mahdi, the messianic figure who would appear to save the world from godlessness in its last days, was shortly to appear. "Then came the volcanic explosion, along with the movement for political change. The prediction made by this charismatic Islamic mystic, and ardently accepted by tens of thousands of his followers, that the Mahdi was about to come, turns out to be intimately connected to the eruption of 1883.... The Islamic teaching concerning the Mahdi and his holy war against the infidel holds that the arrival of the Mahdi is always accompanied by a series of definite signs. There would be diseases of cattle. There would be floods. There would be blood-coloured rain. And volcanoes would erupt, and people would die. And so it happened that each and every one of these predictions occurred in Banten in precisely the manner that Hajji Abdul Karim had forecast." The mullahs expanded their influence in the period which followed. Yemeni fundamentalists sent inflammatory letters....teams of 40, clothed in white robes with white turbans, set about attacking selected villages where strongholds of Dutch influence existed.

And so it is when, as protection against that which threatens, we fall back on legalistic prescriptions. Scripts are written to quell insecurity. Cults emerge. Counsellors of all kinds are tempted to try to assure frightened people with advice, and when they fall to temptation, the deep desire is that they themselves will feel better.

Remember the line from the old TV ad "I feel better now!" Well might it ring in the ears of the counsellor as he/she closes the door on the traumatised client at the close of a session of such advice-giving!

The Abbe de Tourville wrote "the best directors are not those who are tied to any system, but those whose aim is to direct, help, and further each soul according to its own nature. For God never makes two souls exactly alike." "We are the brothers and sisters of the Saints. They became holy in their way; we must become holy in ours, not in theirs. Otherwise, sanctity would be for nothing but a wearisome routine.... Why should we always give pre-eminence to the minds of the dead rather than to those of the living? ...Come! Come! We must wake up and try to be what we are reasonably meant to be and not that which other people have been. One does not become holy by copying others but by making good use of what is truly part of oneself." (*Letters of Direction – Thoughts on the Spiritual Life*, Dacre Press, Suffolk, 1939 pp.27,28)

Your own pattern: one of the things that gives form to the unique pattern of our being is what Kosuke Koyama describes as 'the emotive regions of the heart'.

How open do we dare to allow ourselves to be in order to hear again how God's Spirit can touch our hearts? (projection, defence mechanisms, fear etc)

In what ways has 'chaos' been the crucible for new birth in your soul?

Each step an exploration in wonderment

G.K. Chesterton, in his book, recounts a debate between two poets, Mr. Gregory and Mr. Syme, paraphrased.

Mr. Gregory: "I will tell you why all the passengers in railroad trains look so sad and tired. It's because they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for, that place they will reach. After they have passed Sloane Square, they know the next station will be Victoria, and nothing but Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture if the next station were unaccountably Baker Street."

Mr. Syme: (with equal conviction): "If what you say is true, your passengers can only be as prosaic as your poetry. For the rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epochal when a man with one arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also miraculous when a man with one engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; in chaos the train might go anywhere.



The magic is this: the conductor says, 'Victoria,' and lo, it is Victoria. Every time the train comes into the station it has ... triumphed over chaos. You say contemptuously that when one has left Sloane Square he must come inevitably to Victoria. I say one might do a thousand things instead. When one comes to Victoria, he should arrive with a sense of hairbreadth escape; and when he hears the conductor shout, 'Victoria,' it is indeed Victoria!"

God creates in the midst of chaos

Some events in the life of Jeremiah are of great help for us in dealing with the mystery of chaos. Jeremiah found that God creates in the midst of chaos. The closing years of the 7th century BC were a time of decline for Judah. Jerusalem was to fall to the Babylonian armies in 597BC. About 30 years before the overthrow of the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was called to his impossibly difficult prophetic ministry in an environment of political folly and religious corruption. His ministry was to last about 40 years. Jeremiah 1:4-5 depicts the young prophet discerning a remarkable truth: that the living God had been deeply involved in Jeremiah's life from before his birth. Imagine that these words of the Lord have been addressed to you. You have been chosen for a special life path, from before the Lord formed you in your mother's womb. God is an active Spirit, influencing your whole life-direction. This purposeful, loving shaping action of God has been critical in your formation since your conception! How do you respond? Such an awareness generates a fresh perspective on how we see ourselves in this world: companioned by Another, whatever happens! Further, in Jeremiah 1:6-10 we see that Jeremiah, in the face of a call to a prophetic ministry, felt utterly unequal to the task that lay ahead. Is there a 'speechless youth' within you? Does the image of the 'speechless youth' represent an area of vulnerability, timidity, inadequacy or lack of faith within you? Jeremiah would not be freed from the rigours and pressures of a demanding ministry. Politically, he was to be a failure. He lived as a prophet for 23 years without seeing any result. This man, the 'weeping prophet', may have had wholeness as his objective. His condition was frequently one of brokenness, but he would be companioned by God. And he would live a life of amazing courage, withstanding the pressures of friends to seek after their goals, in order to seek after the purposes of God for him. He dared to think and act differently from the crowd. And so his life was continually to experience upheaval and turbulence.

We never know when it will come, the whirlwind of chaos. An unexpected phone call, a medical report, a ruptured relationship, the unheralded rebirth of old wounding memories. In any of a thousand ways we may be swept into the hurricane. Sometimes, we are like Jesus' disciples in the boat on Lake Galilee, in the eye of a frightening storm. We wait for the storm to cease, we wait for resolution, for peace. But the time of waiting contains within it the time of harsh gifting, the time of experiencing the graceful, tender touch of God.

Churches are very good at trying to provide a haven for the comfort of those who don't want to grow, who are keen to remain with beliefs and practices that have been good for them in the past. But the Spirit is always calling us to move onward in the great adventure of life in God.

Prayerful risk-taking is never particularly comfortable, it may be for us the place of chaos! We can only live in such openness and trust if we experience the closeness of God.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is sometimes a ministry of upheaval, a stripping away of things about which we thought we were certain, convictions that are our own constructions rather than flowing with the stream of God's unfolding. Such times of upheaval are an opening of closed doors, an unfolding, a moving forward, a giving birth, a releasing of energy. In God, nothing is static. All that we choose is either an inner shrinking, escaping, dying, or a moving forward, creating as we go.

The root meaning of the word Paraclete, which refers to the Holy Spirit of God, has various translations. It means "the One who stands by us and calls us forth." The ultimate Being is inherent



in all things, creating and transforming without pause. Even when God rests after creation, that rest is by its very nature dancing within all parts of creation (Gen. 2:3). Dimly we realise that the ultimately stable is the infinitely variable. [derived from Flora Slosson Wuellner's *The Mountains Skipped Like Rams*, *Weavings*, Vol XV, No. 6, Nov-Dec 2000, pp.6-11]

In his theological science-fiction novel *Perelandra*, C. S. Lewis writes of a mystical chant among the angels concerning the infinite creative dance of God's Spirit: "The Great Dance does not wait.... We speak not of when it will begin. It has begun from before always.... The dance which we dance is at the centre and for the dance all things were made.... Never did he make two things the same; never did he utter one word twice.... He dwells (all of him dwells) within the seed of the smallest flower and is not cramped: Deep Heaven is inside him who is inside the seed.. ..Each grain is at the centre. The dust is at the centre. The worlds are at the centre.. . . Where God is, there is the centre. He is in every place. . . in each place the whole God.... In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock... each is equally at the centre. . . . There seems no plan because it is all plan: there seems no centre because it is all centre. (C.S.Lewis, *Perelandra*, New York, MacMillan, 1946, pp.229-233)

In the scriptures the mountains and hills are metaphors of unmoving stability, but in the Psalms we are shown a different picture: "The mountains skipped like rams, The hills like lambs" (Ps114.4). Mountains dance, but in a time frame so vastly different from ours that they seem to stand still.

Think about this possible interpretation of a saying of Jesus: When Jesus re-named Simon as Peter - a rock on which the church would be built, he told him that 'the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.' We usually picture that as the rock standing firm against all the attacks of hell. But what if it means instead that this 'rock' of the church is sent flying, crashing against hell's gates - and they cannot withstand its power?' Mountains skipping! The stable rock of the church hurling through the air! The flying, dancing rock of God on which we seek to build our lives! (Wuellner, p.10)

Some presentations of the Christian faith are those that offer a static state, resisting change and transformation beyond conversion: an image of solidity and security. However, the image that we are here invited to embrace is that of dancing with our Companion the whirlwind, in which change is all around, a loving life-force in which the changes within our lives are caught up in the ever-changing, ever-living Spirit. That which becomes our security is our ever-evolving relationship with God...ever moving, always transforming, ceaselessly enriching.





SEASON OF HARSH GIFTING

I saw blossom
blown in winter's blasts
this morning
dancing against all the odds.

And white flames bursting
from magnolia's greyness
greet us
cheekily,
magnificently,
laughing at our unknowing.

Streams of sap had been beneath,
harbinger of fresh beauty
beyond last summer's full leaf

Reminder of yet new
growth
when energies and ideas
and summer sweetness
yield to winter wonder,
harsh gifts
beyond belief.



SPIRIT DISTURBER

It is more scary
than we imagine
living in certainty,
where change
cracks the concrete
and distorts all
to the craziest
of awkward angles.

Better to live
where the winds howl
and breezes caress
and boughs toss
in celebration
that the Spirit
beckons beyond
our every conceivable
and comfortable
structure,
our every intellectual
satisfaction,
our every emotional security -
to drink deeply, wildly,
the Wind.

Rev Ross Kingham





Resourcing Future Directions and Our Mission

Canberra Region Presbytery Standing Committee – 2021

Summary

How do we envision being a contemporary, courageous and growing church through our use of property? The Church's shared understandings about the responsibilities and benefits regarding property owned by the Uniting Church in Australia can help lead us toward a vision of property as the "common wealth" of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole church.

In 2014 a special issue of the NSW-ACT Synod Insights Magazine discussed Mission and Property with the theme [Property for a Pilgrim People](#). Synod has continued to discuss property in its 2021 Future Directions Documents, and in particular the [Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework](#).

Property for a Pilgrim People – Mission and Property looks at Biblical perspectives on property and how these can relate to the Church's use of property in current times, as well as providing some useful definitions. This notes the tensions and changes in the use of property and draws the conclusions that key principles are that property does not exist for the benefit of an individual or group but should be used principally for the purpose of the Church's mission with an underlying principle of equality of benefit.

The *Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework* is about providing resources for this focus on mission across the whole Church. Property resources are the common wealth of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole Church. *Future Directions* sets out an overall approach across our Congregations, Presbyteries and Synod for resourcing mission into the future, particularly the future directions approved by Synod. Key to this are five guiding principles: the Church's resources should be managed to:

1. enable the Church to do what we have been called
2. achieve more for the Church at mission
3. support the flourishing of healthy Congregations, the development of vital ministry, and engagement with the community in transformative ways
4. be used for the common good of the Church and enable the whole of the Church to be greater than the sum of its parts; and
5. be managed where the ministry or project is happening, if there is capacity to manage it effectively.

To go forward we need congregations to look at their place and future within the overall picture of the whole Uniting Church. This can be considered in terms of their individual mission plans and in relation to the Presbytery and Synod mission plans. We want to grow in how we use property resources as the common wealth of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole Church.

Introduction

Our NSW/ACT Synod recently approved a [Future Directions plan](#) through which it is leading our Presbyteries, Congregations and Synod entities to focus in mission on enabling the growth of the Church's witness to Jesus Christ through:

- rural and regional ministry,
- ministry to young people,
- walking together with First Peoples,
- active stewardship of the Earth including climate justice and
- renewal of discipleship in and through congregations.

A [Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework](#) has also been designed to provide principles for us to follow. This framework includes an acknowledgement of four key resources that support the work of the Uniting Church: people, programs, financial assets and property. This paper is focused on only one of these – property. It aims to set out a shared understanding about property and to help lead us toward a vision of property being the common wealth of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole church.

The Mission Planning for Canberra Region Presbytery is building upon consultation with congregations, who are all in various stages of their own mission plans. As background to this, congregations and Presbytery are encouraged to consider the best use of their property and cash resources for the mission of God.

Throughout our Presbytery there are different understandings of the responsibilities and benefits regarding property owned by the Uniting Church in Australia. This property includes the buildings we gather in for worship and through which we serve our local communities, the residences for our ministers and pastors, and property we rent or lease out to earn revenue to pay for the costs of buildings and mission. Our different understandings can lead to confusion and difficulties when Presbytery or Synod become involved in decisions about property.

Property for a Pilgrim People, Mission and Property

What does the Bible have to say about property? An article in Insights Magazine – [Property For a Pilgrim People](#), explains that the Bible has much to say about property but in quite a different context to the world experienced in 21st century Australia. The laws governing property and debt, debt forgiveness and land tenure as expressed in the Sabbath and Jubilee year laws were about ensuring that property did not end up in the hands of a few. There were also laws that mandated the support of the temple and those who ministered there.

In the biblical tradition there is also tension, if not a conflict, over whether or not it was appropriate to build a temple for the worship of God. In the world of Abraham and Sarah and their offspring there were sacred places but no temples or buildings of that nature. Solomon built a temple and for the next 1000 years the temple was at the heart of religious life.

By the time of the New Testament, synagogues had come into being as centres of gathering and learning. Quite probably these were multifunctional buildings that served both secular and religious purposes – a cross between a town hall and a place of worship. They probably served as banqueting halls, as places of refuge and courts of law among other things. The synagogue served as the centre of the cultural and religious life supported by the whole community where culture and religion were inextricably bound together.

Jesus and the apostles visited synagogues and engaged in the activities, discussions and debates there, but it would seem that the early Christian Church initially had no property for the purpose of gathering and worship. In Acts 4 individuals sold property for the leaders in the church to distribute to the needy. One can conclude that the emphasis was in sharing the resources for the benefit of others.

Later we see Paul collecting money from the Churches established in other parts of the Roman Empire to support the struggling Church in Jerusalem afflicted with persecution and famine. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul writes that the reason for giving is about “equality” - clearly he believed rich Churches should support poorer ones.

In terms of how Church property is used, the Bible does not really provide specific or consistent instruction or examples that are relevant to the circumstances of the Church in our time and place. However, that does not mean we cannot deduce some principles that help us reflect on what might be appropriate.

The Old Testament law of Jubilee required that after 50 years all agricultural land be returned to the original owner without compensation. This does not provide a model but suggests a principle that might be applied to Church property which does not exist only for the benefit of one person or group of people.

If the Church is to follow in the way of Jesus, living by His mission statement, we would expect the resources we have to be used in preaching of “...Good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18- 19). Here there is an allusion to the year of Jubilee – the universal release of people and property from the burdens of the past.

The mission of Jesus is essentially about transforming society, reconciliation and renewal. Synod’s 2021 Future Directions documents have been prepared to focus on renewal and to assist us to address the key question: How will we collectively and creatively deploy the Church’s assets to serve the mission of God?

The Uniting Church’s document, Property for a Pilgrim People, includes some relevant property terminology to assist in considering the different roles that Synod, Presbyteries and individual congregations have in their shared responsibility for property.

Property means property of whatsoever nature whether real or personal, and includes money, investments, and rights relating to property [Reg 4.1].

Ownership In its usual understanding means that a person or entity has exclusive right to property and to determine how to use and deal with it. The Uniting Church as a whole owns all Uniting Church property through two property trusts. All Councils of the Church have an interest in the property held by the Uniting Church.

The Congregation has beneficial use (noting, other bodies may also have such use). Presbytery has to ensure property resources are being used and maintained appropriately for mission. The Synod administers and sets policy for property assets held by the Property Trust on behalf of the whole Church. The National UCA Assembly provides “for the control and management of the property and funds vested in the Church.” [UCA Constitution, Division 3 Part D]

All Councils of the Church have a responsibility in relation to property but none have exclusive rights.

Stewardship is the joint responsibility to use resources for the Mission of the Church, representing a greater responsibility than simply the preservation of capital or good maintenance of property assets.

Beneficial Users - This is a term that has come into common usage in the Church that acknowledges a right and responsibility that must be recognised but which is not ownership. A Congregation has

beneficial use of property owned by the Uniting Church as a whole. It has the benefit of the use of all “property of the Church acquired or held for the use of the Congregation” and the Church Council has the responsibility of management and administration of it [Reg 4.4.1]. The same principle applies in relation to other councils or bodies [Reg 4.5.1].

Common wealth includes all the resources of the Church within the bounds of The Synod.

The predominant expectation has been that property is solely for the benefit of the Congregation that has beneficial use of it. The Church recognises that there is a need for another approach. Such an approach would recognise a common wealth of resources available for the mission of the Church more broadly mostly for the benefit of the local mission but not necessarily in the locality or context of the property. The beneficial ownership of all property whether real or personal is vested in the whole Uniting Church in Australia [UCA Constitution, Clause 50]. It has been noted that the Sydney property market has delivered huge gains in value for property in the metropolitan areas, not replicated in regional or rural centres. A common wealth approach would require a change in a way of thinking from it is “mine” to it is “our collective responsibility to discern and use what belongs to God for the good of all.” Conversely it cannot be seen as a “grab” by those who have not from those who have but an opportunity for there to be a corporate discerning as to where resources that belong to all may best be deployed for the overall mission of the Church.

Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework 2021

This framework proposes that ‘the Church commits to sharing and using our resources to strengthen the Church’s commitment to the mission of God, as a whole and as individual congregations, to enable us to continue to bear our unique and transformative witness of the gospel’.

We are called as disciples of Christ to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and treat the least as though they were Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:31-45). As Jesus’ disciples were commissioned to go and make disciples of all people (Matthew 28:16–20), so too are we. The early church provides an example of disciples sharing their possessions for the benefit of the whole community, fulfilling Christ’s calling to care for those in need. We do not do this in our own strength. The Holy Spirit strengthens us to be generous.

As we grow our witness to Jesus Christ through *Future Directions*, we also remember the faithfulness of the generations who went before us who determined, like the disciples in the early church, that our property should benefit the whole church and not any single entity.

Resourcing decisions will be based on five resourcing principles:

1. **Delivery of mission:** Resourcing should enable the Church to do what we have been called, in the words of the Basis of Union, to do: to be “an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself”.
2. **Achieve more:** The Church’s resources should ‘work harder’ and achieve more for the Church at mission. That is, the responsible entity – Synod, Presbytery, Congregation, or board - should actively and strategically steward their resources and consider the best use of their resources for the Church’s mission and ministry.
3. **Seek energy:** Resources should support the flourishing of healthy Congregations, the development of vital ministry, and engagement with the community in transformative ways. Resources should be moved from where there is no energy to do things to where there is energy.

4. **Whole of Church:** Our resources should be used for the common good of the Church and enable the whole of the Church to be greater than the sum of its parts. We should consider how our resources can help the wider Church achieve its mission and ministry activities across NSW and the ACT, and across different generations.
5. **Inter-conciliar and collaborative processes:** Congregations, Presbyteries, the Synod and agencies will work together to define tasks and responsibilities, with the polity of the Church guiding project plans, leadership and decision making. Resources should be managed where the ministry or project is happening, if there is capacity to manage it effectively.

The *Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework* is about providing resources for mission across the whole Church. Property resources are the common wealth of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole Church. Different parts of the Church will play different roles in progressing resourcing decisions. Congregations and Presbyteries will identify Future Directions projects locally and how the congregation's resources can be shared to resource the Future Direction of the Synod. Synod will be responsible for overseeing Future Directions priorities and the liberation of resources to enable implementation of the priorities. It will also manage the day-to-day implementation of the resourcing process and decisions, and support Presbyteries and Congregations with expertise in people, program, financial and property management and development. Further details about the roles of Uniting Mission & Education, the Property Board, Uniting Financial Services Board and the Uniting Board can be found in the Framework document.

Next steps

It has been acknowledged that ideas about sharing resources are probably challenging to many Presbyteries, Congregations and Synod entities. Some may believe that if they built up resources in the past, they should hold on to them for ever. Where two congregations amalgamate, they often like to keep both buildings so they can alternate services between the two churches and rent out the second manse to provide enough income to support a full-time minister. But is this the best way to support our mission objectives? In some cases across the Synod we have slowly declining congregations with a handful of members having beneficial ownership of large and valuable property resources. While in other places there are vibrant growing missional congregations needing more resources to support the growth, but not having access to the same kind of valuable property to enable that growth.

Canberra Region Presbytery has previously identified in its own *Future Directions 2018-2021* document the importance of encouraging congregations that are experiencing growth to build their potential and capacity to expand their mission as well as caring for fragile congregations to assist with difficult decisions. The Synod, Presbytery and Congregations already have a track record of using cash and property resources to support the overall mission of the whole Uniting Church. Some examples where financial contributions from these parts of the Uniting Church assisted mission in the wider church through building programmes include the Greenhills Conference Centre, Weston Creek Uniting Church and Gungahlin Uniting Church. You may have stories of other ways we have worked together for the mission of God through the whole Uniting Church.

Our Presbytery is encouraging congregations to look at their place and future within the overall picture of the whole Uniting Church. This can be considered in terms of individual mission plans and in relation to the Presbytery and Synod mission plans. It is important for Church Councils to familiarise themselves with the documents used as the basis for this paper (links in Introduction).

These documents identify the Synod's commitment to prioritising the following areas for mission across the Church:

- Rural and regional ministry
- Ministry with people in the first third of life
- Walking together with First Peoples and our covenant with Congress
- An active stewardship of the earth
- Working with Presbyteries to organise ourselves to promote growth within and through our Congregations

We want to grow in how we use property resources as the common wealth of the Uniting Church for the mission of God through the whole Church.

50% Fee Reduction – UTC certificates

The Synod and UTC are eager to encourage education in ministry and theology. I am writing to ask for your help to share the following opportunity. And please feel very welcome to contact me directly if I can assist with further information.

Scholarships that cover 50% of the university tuition fees are now offered at UTC for members of the Uniting Church who undertake the Undergraduate Certificate in Theology (for students with no prior university study), or Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies (for students with a prior degree in any discipline).

The 50% scholarship is paid to you as reimbursement following the successful completion of each subject. These Charles Sturt University certificates are taught by UTC faculty and comprise four subjects. You can commence study in either session 1 (February 27) or session 2 (July 10). You may attend UTC classes either in person or by Zoom. Once you have completed your Certificate, your 4 subjects can be credited to a CSU Bachelor's or Master's degree if you wish to continue your study.

I do hope you are able to explore this opportunity. You can do that by contacting either Joanne or Renee at studenta@nswact.uca.org.au or 02 8838 8900.

The UTC staff and students would be delighted to welcome you into our learning community.

Best wishes,

Rev Dr Peter Walker BA (Hons) BTh PhD

Principal | United Theological College

Director of Education | Uniting Church NSW & ACT

P 02 8838 8900 W utc.edu.au

Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT

Charles Sturt University | School of Theology



DRAFT Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26

Introduction

Across 2022, Canberra Region Presbytery has been engaged in mission planning. Each of the four Presbytery gatherings in 2022 were dedicated in a large part to discerning a Presbytery Mission Plan. The March and May gatherings of Presbytery discerned and affirmed four affirmations and their accompanying four Biblical narratives. The May gathering also discerned five commitments for the future of the Presbytery. These were re-presented and affirmed at the August gathering. All of this work was presented to the November gathering of Presbytery in the second draft Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26 that is included below. The November gathering of Presbytery did further work (not yet captured in the draft mission plan below) to work out how each commitment will be achieved.

The hope is that the draft Mission Plan will be sufficiently finalised to be adopted by Presbytery at its first gathering in March 2023.

DRAFT Preamble to the Canberra Region Mission Plan 2023-26

The Uniting Church in Australia is governed locally, regionally and nationally by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world. The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel (Basis of Union, paragraph 15).

The local councils of the Church are the Congregation and its Church Council. Regionally and state-wide, the councils of the Church are the Presbytery and Synod respectively. The national council of the church is the Assembly.

As the Canberra Region Presbytery undertakes mission planning, it is to give heed to the other councils of the Church.

Congregations and Church Councils – local

The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit of Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world (Basis of Union, paragraph 15a).

The Church Council is responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world (Basis of Union, paragraph 15b).

One of the ways Canberra Region Presbytery listens to these local councils of the Church for its mission planning is through listening to the members of Presbytery who include ministers and elected lay people of Congregations.

Synod – state/territory

The NSW/ACT Synod has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church’s worship, witness and service in our region (Basis of Union, paragraph 15d).

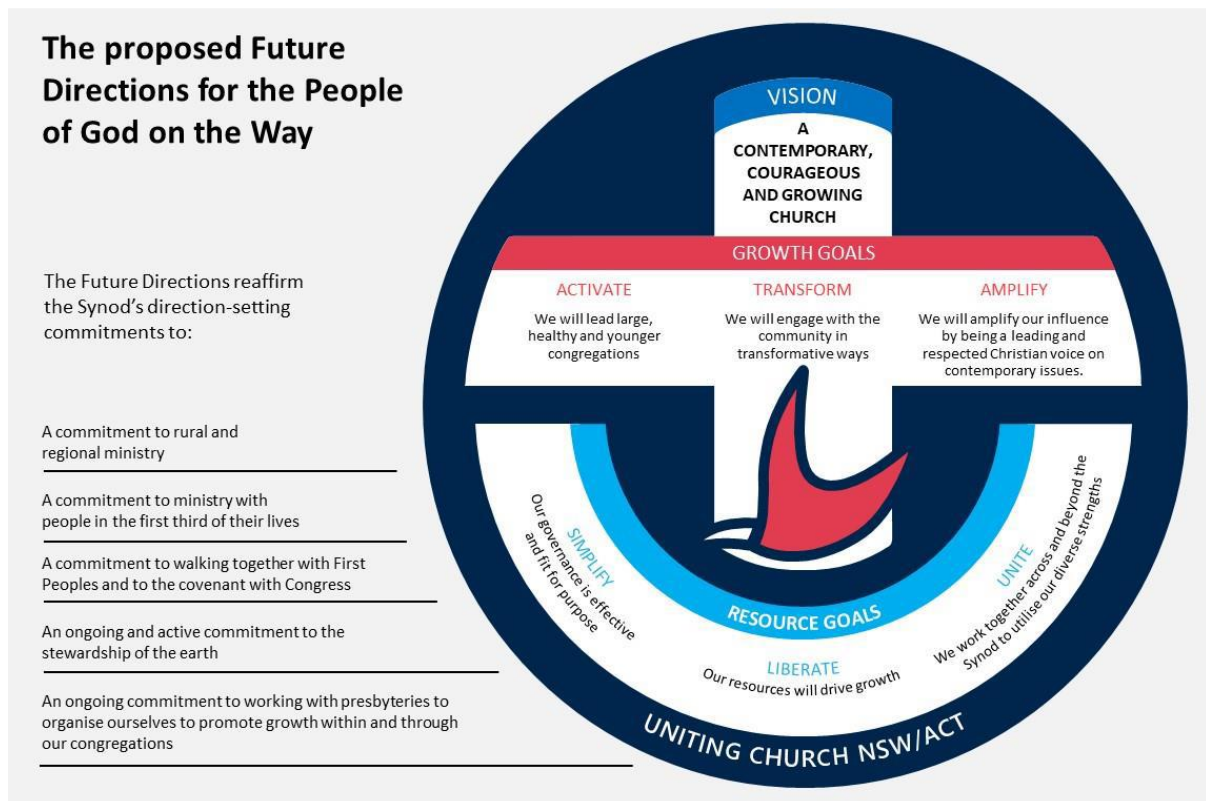
Over the last few Synod meetings, the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT has made several direction-setting resolutions, including resolutions relating to Saltbush (2016), Pulse (2017), Makaratta (2019), Climate Action (2019), and Growth (2019). The “Focus on Growth” report presented at the Uniting Church’s NSW and ACT Synod 2019 meeting states:

That the Synod commit, over the next three years, that we will organise ourselves, and request our Presbyteries to so organise themselves, to prioritise and enable growth in discipleship, in relationships, in number and in impact within and through our congregations.

The intended purpose of this proposal is to provide, should the Synod agree, a lens through which our Synod and Presbyteries may deliberately focus their life and witness over the next three years.

This Growth focus was adopted and subsequently re-affirmed at Synod 2021 through the Future Directions for the People of God on the Way resolution. Church leaders in presbyteries and congregations are invited to reorient their thinking about church and mission and reorganise themselves for being a contemporary, courageous and growing church proclaiming Jesus Christ in worship, witness and service. For the full report and resolutions about Future Directions, please see <https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9996/future-directions-for-the-people-of-god-on-the-way.pdf>

Below is a summary presentation



Assembly – national

The Assembly’s determining responsibilities include the promotion of the Church’s mission. At its triennial meeting in 2022 the Assembly received the Act2 report. Act2 is a process of discernment about how faithfully following Christ in our time and place shapes the Uniting Church into the future. You can read more about it at this link – [Act2: On The Way - Uniting Church in Australia](#)

**JESUS TOOK THE LOAVES, AND
WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE
DISTRIBUTED THEM**

John 6:1-15

Further to the Act2 report, the Assembly’s resolutions included ... “to identify ways to strengthen and develop the local expressions of worship, witness, service, and the making and forming of disciples, in the various forms of communities of faith”.

Presbytery – regional

According to the Basis of Union (paragraph 15c), the role of a Presbytery is:

“To perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the church in the area for which is it responsible ... It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another’s faith, to bear one another’s burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus.”

The Constitution sets out the following responsibilities for the Presbytery at Section 26:

“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 its bounds, providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and in their participation in the wider work of the Church.”

Referring to these above provisions, Rev Dr Peter Walker (Principal of United Theological College) summarises the role of the Presbytery as “to exercise the ministry of oversight, doing so for the sake of the faith and unity of the congregations within its bounds, in ways that encourage and strengthen the congregations in their mission.”

Mission Planning of the Canberra Region Presbytery

The Canberra Region Presbytery listens to its congregations and the above directions of Assembly and Synod. Giving heed to these councils of the Uniting Church, the Canberra Region Presbytery at its open meetings in 2022/23 engaged in mission planning for the Presbytery to discern the following Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26.

DRAFT Canberra Region Presbytery Mission Plan 2023-26

A plan for across our diverse congregations, faith communities and agencies

Leading the Church to our Local Communities

Building Deeper Connections Across the Presbytery

Together as Canberra Region Presbytery we have told stories of God clearly at work among us, we've listened to Scripture, we've noticed what is being born and how we can help it arrive, and we've dreamed of what we would look like at our best.

Out of this we affirm:

- God is always present, preparing the way and calling us into mission
- God is doing new things in us and through us in unexpected, surprising, and amazing ways
- God is calling us outward to be present and engaged in our communities.
- God's faithfulness leads us to share and grow our faith, calling and forming new disciples.

THEN THE SPIRIT SAID TO PHILIP, "GO OVER
TO THIS CHARIOT AND JOIN IT" — Acts 8:26-40

And together as Canberra Region Presbytery we are committed to:

- Being church together – Building deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church – Becoming more cohesive, while valuing our diversity, and growing from each other's experiences
- Helping each other grow connections with our local communities – Expressing what we do in different ways to push into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context. This is bound to be uncomfortable for us
- Being part of each other's lives – friendly and supportive – Having Presbytery members, committees and staff very much part of the life of congregations, faith communities and agencies as a supportive source of vitality, inspiration, fellowship, and practical resourceful assistance
- Using property to resource God's mission – Having property that is fit for mission purposes, and working cooperatively and creatively to better share our property to expand our resources for mission
- Engaging in social justice, equality, and local issues – Speaking and acting out as a safe church

**IF YOU OFFER YOUR FOOD TO THE
HUNGRY AND SATISFY THE NEEDS OF
THE AFFLICTED, THEN YOUR LIGHT
SHALL RISE IN THE DARKNESS ... YOU
SHALL BE LIKE A WATERED GARDEN ...
YOUR ANCIENT RUINS SHALL BE
REBUILT**

Isaiah 58:6-12

THE SMALLEST OF ALL THE SEEDS, BUT
WHEN IT HAS GROWN IT IS THE GREATEST OF
SHRUBS — Matthew 13:31-32

Expanding on our commitments ...

Being church together – Building deeper connections across the Presbytery and wider Uniting Church – Becoming more cohesive and growing from each other’s experiences

Purposes of these connections include:

To understand the opportunities each other has for connecting with local community (like happened through the story telling at the first mission planning Presbytery gathering)

To share stories of what congregations have experimented with and what they want to do, and what they know of available resources

To redistribute and share resources, including property, finances, training and technology

To develop common areas of ministry and mission

To attend to the geographical remoteness of parts of our Presbytery

These connections will be strengthened by praying for each other and could be further facilitated through developing networks that already exist, like the treasurers annual meeting; monthly missional gatherings; ethical ministry workshops for lay leaders; zoom Bible study groups. Other useful networks could be established, for example, chairs/secretaries of church councils and combined worship services. Presbytery gatherings might include more opportunities for small group story telling. The more that people interact, the more connections they will find.

Helping each other grow connections with our local communities – Expressing what we do in different ways to push into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context. This is bound to be uncomfortable for us

In growing these connections, we will seek to work with and alongside our local communities. The kinds of spaces to connect with our local communities include:

- With new people to whom we relate
- With neighbours
- Breakfasts in the community
- Through Op Shops
- With local like-minded community organisations
- Through ecumenical and interfaith relationships

**DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE
READING? HOW CAN I UNLESS
SOMEONE GUIDES ME?**

Acts 8:26-40

**LOOK, HERE IS WATER! WHAT IS TO
PREVENT ME FROM BEING BAPTISED?**

- With young people, perhaps through volunteering at schools using programs like “Kids Hope”, through Greenhills or through social justice action
- Through use of our property
- Through natural disaster support, for example, bushfire response
- With different cultures and traditions
- With new housing estates, like Ginninderry, Googong and Molonglo, through creating faith communities, and with resident associations
- Through support of First Peoples and refugees and other justice connections mentioned below
- Through outward mission via Deacon network

Being part of each other’s lives – friendly and supportive – Having Presbytery members, committees and staff very much part of the life of congregations, faith communities and agencies as a supportive source of vitality, inspiration, fellowship and practical resourceful assistance.

Communication is key to this commitment:

- Communication of missional events for spreading ideas, and communication about resources, for example, grants, mission planning, safe church sessions, employment and financial expertise, understanding wider UCA structure, engaging sensitively with survivors of abuse
- Using an assortment of relevant communication channels



Also significant for this commitment is helping ease administrative load so as not to suffocate the missional work

Using property to resource God’s mission – Having property that is fit for mission purposes, and working cooperatively and creatively to better share our property to expand our resources for mission

With commitment to:

- Walking together with First Peoples and to the covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
- Using property to grow connections with our local communities through missional relationships rather than simply landlord-tenant relationships
- Working cooperatively for upkeep of property and repurposing property

Engaging in social justice, equality, and local issues – Speaking and acting out as a safe church

In this engagement, we will seek to work with and alongside like-minded people in the wider community, expressing our faith and growing in discipleship

Areas of engagement include:

- Walking with First Peoples
- Refugee support
- Confronting power – local and international
- Support for people living with disability
- Affordable and social housing and crises accommodation
- Climate change
- Assistance (including housing) for those in family violence situations
- Drug law reform
- Aged care
- Age of criminal responsibility
- LGBTQI+ community
- Abuse by the church
- Prison ministry



Important for this commitment is raising the profile of the Presbytery Social Justice Group as part of building connections across the Presbytery and wider UCA for speaking and acting out

Towards a Common Understanding of Mission

Approved by Pastoral Relations Committee of Canberra Region Presbytery

Across our Presbytery it is important that we move toward a common understanding of mission as we seek to grow in God's mission.

Mission of God – Including calling and forming disciples

The mission of God to which the church is called is very broad. It includes going and being with the world in service, following the one who came not to be served but to serve. Across the Uniting Church we have great strengths in such service, and there are many and varied ways in which people serve the wider community individually in their daily lives and corporately through activities of the church. This is probably true of your own congregation, faith community or church agency where there are numerous ways, previous and continuing, that folk are deeply committed to serving in local community organisations and through church activities as an expression of their faith.

In addition, the fullness of the mission of God also includes calling and forming disciples of Jesus Christ. Here too, we now must “go and be with others”. We are to be accommodating to them, rather than expecting them to “come and join us” in our patterns of conventional church life for them to grow as disciples.

From “come and join us” to “go and be with others”

The references to a change from “come and join us” to “go and be with others” aim to describe a shift in mission focus for the church over time. Previously church mission could largely rely on a “come and join us” approach. This was a time when churches were highly respected and were at the centre of the wider community life, and being a good citizen entailed church attendance. That era was some of the heydays for the church when the church could expect people would come and join us. All we really needed to do was put on a church service, and people would come. The patterns of conventional church life (with its worship styles and times and models of discipleship) were well accepted, and people willingly obliged.

However, with changes in society, the church no longer enjoys the respect it once had, and people are less likely to be interested in making the changes needed for them to assimilate into the patterns of conventional church life. This means that the “come and join us” approach to mission no longer serves us as well as it once did for calling and forming disciples.

Now, our approach to mission needs to be more along the lines of “go and be with others”. We can no longer expect the wider community to come to us and assimilate into conventional church life to become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Rather, the church needs to change to accommodate to the wider society to find fresh ways of calling people to discipleship. We need to be accommodating. We need to “go and be with others” to build trusting relationships on their turf and on their terms, and look for how the Holy Spirit is working in their lives, and respond appropriately to create fresh pathways aligning with the Spirit’s work toward discipleship.

Example from playgroups

Perhaps an example, growing out of the life of the congregations, might be helpful to illustrate the above intended meaning of mission being more, now, about “go and be with others” rather than “come and join us”.

Playgroups are often very well received acts of loving service by congregations, and a lovely and much appreciated community grows among the families who attend. However, it is not unusual for some individuals in congregations with playgroups to view their playgroup as a something like a funnel that would channel playgroup families to the church’s existing Sunday morning worship service. Such an attitude fits neatly with the “come and join us” approach to mission where the families are expected to assimilate into the patterns of conventional church for their growth as disciples.

However, “a go and be with others” approach to mission would take a very different journey with the families. A congregation with a playgroup has already listened to the needs of the young families in the wider community and has sought to be accommodating by setting up and running the playgroup. This is an act of loving service in which folk from the church are with folk from the wider community, and it is part of the mission of God. We hope and trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of the families, and we are aware of folk from the congregation praying for the families along these lines. A next key step in discerning the work of the Spirit could be to tell the families that folk from the congregation do indeed pray for them, and to ask the families for any matters that they would like the church folk to include in their prayers.

Such an initiative around prayer is likely to be well received as generally people do not find an offer of prayer to be confronting, rather they find it comforting. Such praying will also build the

community among the group as people share what is important to be prayed about, and will also offer some clues about how God is working in their lives.

This is a fresh pathway into discipleship. It may even be that down the track one or two of the parents or grandparents find themselves drawn by the Spirit even more toward the God of this prayer, and may give off signs of seeking more about faith. Then one of the church folk involved in the play group might be able to meet up with them in a local café at a time that suits them to hear and respond to what they are seeking. If others have a similar interest, perhaps a small group could form.

Who knows where all this might lead, but one of the important points is that it is all based around being accommodating to the parents or grandparents – going and being with them on their terms, rather than them being required to come and join us by assimilating into the patterns of conventional church.

Presbytery Mission Plan

The account in Scripture of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 is inspirational in this approach to mission. Read the passage to see how much is on the turf and terms, and at the initiative, of the Eunuch – Philip comes to the chariot where the Eunuch is; Philip gets into the chariot and sits beside the Eunuch at his invitation; Philip starts with the passage that the Eunuch is reading; Philip responds to Eunuch's request for baptism. Notice as well how the angel of the Lord and the Spirit are at work.

The draft Presbytery Mission Plan gives expression to this approach to mission. It affirms:

- God is always present, preparing the way and calling us into mission
- God is doing new things in us and through us in unexpected, surprising, and amazing ways
- God is calling us outward to be present and engaged in our communities.
- God's faithfulness leads us to share and grow our faith, calling and forming new disciples.

One of the five commitments in the plan is:

Helping each other grow connections with our local communities – Expressing what we do in different ways to push into new territory in connecting with people in our local communities, as spaces to express and share our faith, and to discern and create new communities of faith that fit the local context. This is bound to be uncomfortable for us.

Perhaps the example above about playgroups could be the beginning of discerning and creating a new community of faith that fits with some of the playgroup families.

Forum with Christians for an Ethical Society
Beyond self-centeredness: is economics built on the
right foundation? With Peter Martin AM,
Tuesday 21 February 7:00 pm,
Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture
<http://ces.org.au/economics-foundation/>



ABC Science Show Geoengineering Interview

Discussion between Robyn Williams (RW) and Robbie Tulip (RT)

ABC Radio National, Saturday, 29 October 2022

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/scienceshow/the-science-show/14091532> .

RT: The reality is that climate politics has been pitched as a war between emission reduction and the fossil fuel industry and the view is that geoengineering is on the side of the fossil fuel industries. So what this has meant is that within the climate science community there is this 'moral hazard' concept, that people say if you take action to geoengineer the climate then you are just failing to address the real issue, which is our emissions.

But let me explain. Our annual emissions are about 15 billion tonnes of carbon (equal to 50 billion tonnes of CO₂), but the [historic emissions](#) are more like 670 billion tonnes of carbon, pushing a trillion tonnes this century. So our annual emissions only worsen the problem, they add up, it is cumulative. This concept of committed warming from past emissions is really central.

We have to see that this 670 billion tonnes of carbon is what is causing the warming, it's what's causing the risk of sea level rise and extreme weather. Until we work out technologies that will remove this vast quantity of past emissions, then cutting our new emissions is really too small, too slow, to really make a difference. It will take us years, decades potentially, to work out how to remove all that committed warming, but we have to do it. There is a great paper from a few years ago by Will Steffen and colleagues from the ANU called *Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene*. It points out that we face the risk of going over a threshold into a hothouse. The only thing that will stop us going over the edge, going over that threshold, is brightening the planet through geoengineering.

We take the view that climate change is so urgent that we need to take what we call a three-legged stool, that is: emission reduction, greenhouse gas removal, and geoengineering or planetary brightening, direct cooling technologies.

RW: And I saw something you wrote suggesting that CO₂ removal is not the highest priority, if you like, but one other of your stool's legs.

RT: Yes, CO₂ removal is part of greenhouse gas removal, which includes methane. Now methane is causing more immediate warming than CO₂ by some measures. But the issue is that the risk of tipping points that has been identified in recent climate science is such that even if we did cut our emissions as fast as we possibly could, even if we did remove CO₂ and methane as fast as possible, we still face enormous risk of climate tipping points, which is why the most urgent climate problem is to increase planetary albedo, that is make the planet brighter, reflect more sunlight in order to directly cool the planetary system.

RW: How would we do that on the surface before going into the sky, and doing something up there with the clouds and so on?

RT: There are many technologies that have been identified to directly cool the planet. And what is needed is a large-scale research program to determine which are the safest, the most effective, the cheapest, most acceptable. Now, the one that's best known, as you allude, is stratospheric aerosol

injection. And, highly controversial, there was last year an effort to do some minimal preliminary field trials, which were scotched due to political opposition.

Now, there are surface-based technologies, such as brightening the Arctic. Restoring sea ice in the Arctic is a major concern, because ice is reflective, it's white, and water is absorptive, it's dark, and each year we're getting closer to what we call a blue ocean event. That is, it's quite likely that there'll be no summer sea ice at all in a few years. This is one of these tipping points that I mentioned. When you do have this blue ocean event, it creates accelerating feedbacks, and that just means that the whole planetary system starts to get warmer. So if we can restore sea ice, both in the Arctic and the Antarctic, then that's possibly one of the best immediate climate solutions.

RW: I've also heard of having white roofs. Was that serious?

RT: Look, it's a good thing. But in terms of the scale that is required to prevent the dangerous tipping points that are looming for climate change, we really need to be thinking on a global basis. We need international cooperation between governments to identify and invest in the best forms of solar radiation management as the most urgent climate priority, while we develop the ability to remove the trillion tonnes of carbon in CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

RW: It's actually a trillion tonnes, is it? That's a lot.

RT: It will be a trillion of carbon by the end of this century. Oxford University has an excellent [website](#) on the trillionth tonne. It's currently sitting at 670 billion tonnes, increasing by about 15 billion tonnes per year. So that means by the end of this century, a trillion tonnes, but that doesn't include the level of methane, which is far worse than has been properly recognised.

RW: Yeah, and when the permafrost goes, Siberia and so on, there'll be more even of it.

RT: Well, what this illustrates is that the IPCC has been negligent in failing to recognise the urgency of solar radiation management. And it illustrates the really difficult politics that we have around climate change because the problem that we have with geoengineering is people just say, oh, you're just working for the fossil fuel industry, you're just giving extra time for more emissions. But the reality is emissions will continue whatever climate activists do. So the reality is we need to take action to stop the dangerous tipping points by investing in effective solutions.

There was a great [paper](#) published recently by Harvard's solar geoengineering group, David Keith and colleagues. They calculated that an investment of \$2 billion in assessing all of the different technologies that are out there to brighten the planet would prevent damage that could cost us \$10 trillion. Now, that's 5,000 to one. So that's a really good benefit–cost ratio, which we really should be considering.

What I'd like to see Australia do is work with other governments to focus on marine cloud brightening. This is a wonderful technology. If we take seawater and turn it into salty mist and send it up into the clouds, it will be a cheap, large-scale way to brighten the planet and re-freeze the poles. So there are really good ideas out there, and we just need to do the research. At the moment there are really strong blockage against just conducting research, and it reflects the difficult politics around climate change. That's what our group is trying to address; we're just saying this research is essential for planetary security, planetary stability. Brightening the planet is a big issue that we really need to engage with as one of the big medium-term security priorities for our planet.

RW: Well, we were introduced to each other by Professor Herbert Huppert, who's a Professor of Maths at Cambridge, and has been a fellow of King's for 50 years. But what was his opinion of some of your suggestions?

RT: Herbert is a brilliant mathematician, and he has recognised the need to take a scientific approach to cooling. Sir David King, former UK Chief Scientist, has established the Cambridge Centre for Climate Repair. Herbert works very closely with Sir David King, and they're doing some magnificent work at Cambridge to identify methods to address global warming. And that's been our contact.

RW: A final question, do you think we'll reach a point where there are so many violent, extreme weather events that we'll simply have to do something, and that's when people will take up these suggestions you've made? And will there be time when we reach that point?

RT: Well, I think we've reached the point now. If you look at the floods in Lismore, if we took action with a technology like marine cloud brightening, it would be possible to help to reduce hurricanes and cyclones, to reduce extreme flooding events. This is technology we can implement immediately that will enable us to prevent the sort of catastrophic risks that people are so worried about.

Empowered Communities

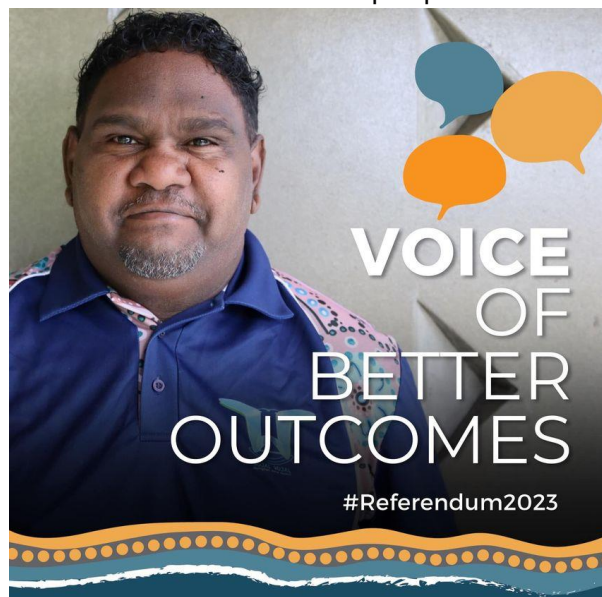
"Having an Indigenous Voice, to be heard and recognised by Governments is something we've been working towards for a very long time. It will better enable us to do business, and to have a direct say in the very things that affect us as First Nations peoples.

I'm talking about those conversations, those bureaucrats that come in and talk around you but they never deliver.

We want to have a better outcome for our mob, whether it's in health or education.

Our voices are important, and they need to be heard." - Bradley Creek, Kuku Jalunji, Mayor of Wujal Wuja

<https://empoweredcommunities.org.au/>



Talking About Religion in Berlin

Robbie Tulip

This article is about a tour of some religious sites in Berlin during the General Assembly of the World Student Christian Federation in June 2022, and a conversation about theology during the tour.

I went on a tour looking at religion in Berlin with a focus on interfaith relations. We first visited the House of One. This remarkable initiative is a planned multi-faith centre with separate worship spaces for Jews, Muslims and Christians joined by a shared meeting area – [see animation](#). Our group heard an introductory talk and did a site tour, located on the ruins of Berlin's oldest known church. The architectural design reflects how a physical space can enable new cultural practice, given that dialogue and cooperation between different traditions seem so difficult to achieve in our contemporary retreat to tribalism. The House of One community have laid their foundation stone and raised the money to complete the building in the next few years. I asked why the name is in English. Our guide Uwe explained that there is no German translation of the strange and impossible English word "of". We had a long conversation with the guide, who was Jewish, including about the growing return of anti-Jewish sentiment among young people in Germany. Encouraging dialogue and personal contact is essential to foster shared understanding. I am wondering if we can learn lessons from this experience in the new multi-faith space at the Australian National University where I manage the chaplaincy.

The Friedrichswerder Church, our next visit, is one of these magnificent old buildings the Germans have lovingly restored to its original glory only to find the collapse of faith has meant there is no demand for its original purpose as a house of worship. But never mind, the architecture creates such a glorious atmosphere of reverence and wonder that they have devoted it to something they really can worship – German marble sculpture.

Some of my favourite sculptures were of Achilles, Cain as a bub, and a bust of the great German scientist Humboldt. Old cathedrals really knew how to do light and acoustics, and this one shows off the art very well.

We called in for lunch at the café run by the Berlin Student Christian Movement. It is a lovely street frontage with a kitchen. The German SCM, or Evangelische Studierenden Gemeinde, has active branches in universities all around the country and is a very impressive organisation. I had the opportunity at the ESG cafe to share views on theology with Patrick Ramsay, Assembly delegate from the UK, who is doing a PhD in geometry. More on that below.



Finally, we visited the tragic site of the former central Berlin synagogue. It was the biggest worship building in the city, with 3000 seats, reflecting the high prominence of the Jewish community until the Nazi destruction. The heart-rending scale of personal and cultural loss from the Hitler genocide continues to be a big source of mourning and grief in Berlin. The synagogue would have been burned down in the nationwide pogroms on Kristallnacht in 1938, but the police dispersed the Nazis and called the fire brigade. We wandered through the empty ground where this magnificent place of worship stood until it was destroyed by British bombing in 1943. Now the front half is all that is left, enough to provide a clear sense of the former scale. The design allowed for the old Jewish tradition of separate seating of men and women. A haunting photo in the synagogue museum showed the main room full of thousands of men, all well dressed and looking distinguished, educated, wealthy, humane and compassionate. Most would have died in Auschwitz, in utter shock at their bewildering betrayal by the nation they had loyally served.



My chat with Patrick as we walked between these sites in Berlin gave me a good chance to explain my views on theology. It is not often that I find anyone who has capacity to talk sensibly about theology without strong preconceptions. Religion is such an emotional topic, where childhood ideas and cultural conventions well up from the unconscious to take on an accidentally absolute status. Fear that any different idea is likely to be crazy is a barrier to courteous conversation and mutual learning. Patrick's PhD level studies in advanced mathematics seemed to protect him somewhat from this hostile syndrome. He was able to ask some astute questions that did not derail the dialogue, a rare thing in my experience.

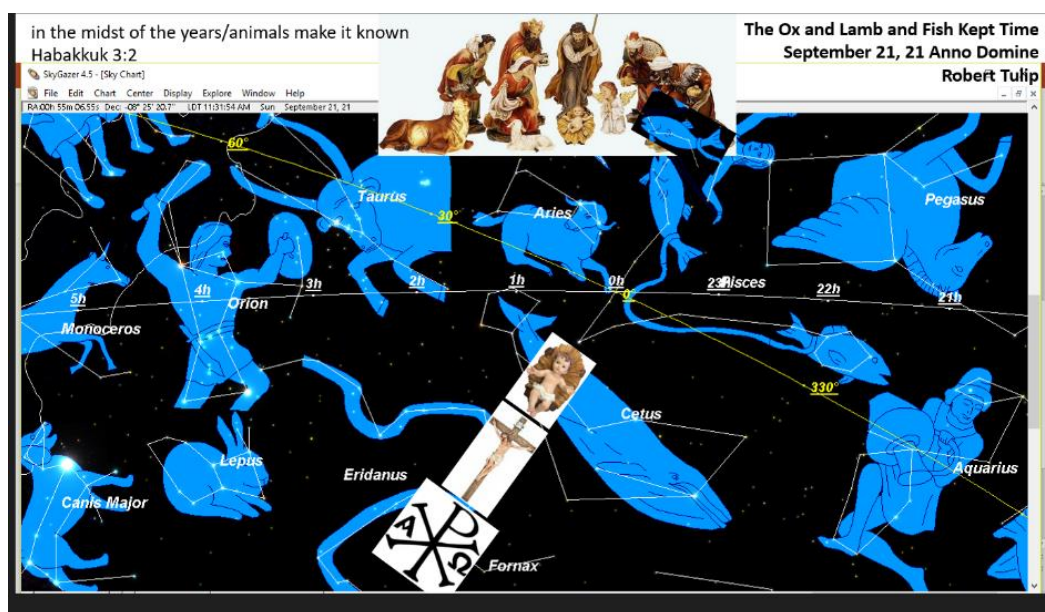
I explained that my interest is to place Christian faith in the context of science, methodically questioning all assumptions. This has led me to a completely different understanding of Christian origins from the orthodox story. For thousands of years, religion was intimately connected to astronomy. This makes it plausible that astronomer-priests noticed the slow movement of the stars against the seasons, as that was essential for them to time planting and rituals. We have no direct evidence of this observation of seasonal shift of the stars as it affected culture. There is, however, abundant circumstantial evidence that observation of the stars was central to Christian origins. The Gospels are full of stellar images that are best explained by knowledge of this seasonal movement, known as precession of the equinoxes. The presence of these camouflaged images in the Bible reflects that the authors regarded actual observation of the visible starry heavens as a way to interpret the order, grandeur, stability and glory of God, in ways that have been largely forgotten.

Ancient astronomers observed the precession of the equinoxes into the constellations of Pisces and Virgo at the time of Christ, as attested by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus in the second century BC. This observation is reflected in messianic expectations around that time, and in numerous Gospel images such as the loaves and fishes, the beginning and end, the fisher of men, as well as the whole theme of the BC/AD turning point of time and numerous obscure visions in the Apocalypse.

I mentioned to Patrick that John's account of the cleansing of the temple has Jesus sweep out the sheep and cows, matching the astronomy of the replacement of the zodiac ages of Aries the Ram and Taurus the Bull by the New Age of Pisces the Fishes. He asked, very reasonably, why then is Jesus described as a lamb as well as a fish? This is the sort of question I like. My reading draws from the symbolism of Jesus as the first and last, represented by the Greek letters alpha and omega seen in numerous Christian symbols such as the Chi Rho Cross. This theme of the unity of the beginning and end creates a cyclic vision in which his imagined role as the Logos or incarnation of eternal reason meant Jesus could equally be represented by the sheep and the fish as symbols of the closing cosmic age and the opening cosmic age.

I further explained to Patrick my hypothesis that a secret wisdom mystery community developed the cosmic vision of Jesus Christ as universal saviour, integrating ancient oral religions from numerous countries. This mystery tradition was savagely suppressed as the Roman Empire co-opted Christian ideas for its military security, leaving almost no sign of the existence of the older symbolic mystery teaching. The main surviving indications of this cosmic origin story after a millennium of Christian censorship are fugitive traces in the Bible, texts that only survived because their real meaning was well hidden. As well, there are large mysterious gaps in Christian history. Most importantly, the justification for this scientific hypothesis is that it provides a simple and coherent explanation of all the available evidence. Astronomy provided the original intellectual structure of Christianity, without any need for literal miracles or supernatural assertions, reading the whole Bible as natural parable.

What I like about this approach is that it provides an elegant basis for Christianity to justify its core ethical ideas against an accurate and plausible ancient cosmology, with a systematic theology that furthermore provides an equally compelling explanation of the ideas of the Second Coming, which could even have been imagined in ancient times as the dawn of the zodiac age of Aquarius. My experience is that Christians tend to greet such conversation with a deathly silence, as it generates such cognitive dissonance they do not know where to begin to discuss it. I mentioned to Patrick that one of the problems is that three rival traditions contributed to Christian origins, philosophy, religion and astrology. Each is hostile to the other two. That makes the effort to compare and integrate them today as an explanation of Christian origins quite unpopular and difficult.



“Time to abandon guilt and embrace loving action – living responsibly in today’s world”

Christians for an Ethical Society Forum November 23 November 2022, Katy Nicholls

“What can I do today to help the climate emergency? And how can I look after future generations?” Jo Clay, Greens MLA for Ginninderra, asks herself these questions every day. In a very personal address, Jo told the attendees at a Christians for an Ethical Society forum that she became a Christian long before she joined the Greens, and shared part of her story, guided by those questions, and an enthusiasm for how many options there are now to make a change. The two key other personal features she shared were the variety of experience she has, from entrepreneurship to law, climate activism to counter-terrorism, and the powerful focussing effect of having a baby, who gives a face to future generations.

In attempting to find her own response to those questions, Jo has developed and documented her carbon diet (<https://www.carbondiet.com.au/jo-clay>), reducing her family’s carbon footprint by 75 per cent while still enabling them to enjoy what matters in life (including steak on Saturday night), noting that the average Australian emits about 22 tons of carbon equivalent a year; developed a patented recycling company; found new ways to express her hedonism and thrill seeking with a lower footprint than flying across the world on a whim (ziplining off buildings for charity anyone?); and entered politics where she daily confronts the toxic false dichotomy of ‘people or the planet’, noting that people will not survive without a planet.

Recent successes for Canberrans she listed were: 7-star ratings for buildings, ensuring they will be well insulated and designed to increase comfort and reduce heating and cooling costs; introducing a ‘get off gas’ policy; and working on reducing transport emissions, starting with electrifying the government fleet and public transport, and supporting electric vehicles. The Climate Council has rated the ACT as being the most advanced of all States and Territories in clean transport (<https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/are-we-there-yet-clean-transport-scorecard-for-australian-states-and-territories/>).

In response to Jo, Alison Weeks, Chair of the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn Caring for Creation movement, reflected on the similarities between the Greens’ approach of social justice and ecological sustainability and the calls of Pope Francis to recognise that everything is connected and to embrace the paradigm of integral ecology. She discussed the Catholic Church’s response to God’s creation, reflecting particularly on the 2015 papal encyclical Laudato Si – On Care for our Common Home. Alison noted that Christians brought the unique perspective of placing God at the centre, and that Genesis charges humans with an obligation to care for creation. Humans are not at the centre of the universe, but each one of us is one of God’s creation. Alison emphasised there is no difference between the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor – the earth has become one of the poor.

The local Caring for Creation movement has learnt that a crucial step to enable change is educating ourselves to see anew, and then to find a common language including respect for difference. Actions they are initiating include solar panels, divesting fossil fuel investments, encouraging electrical vehicles.

What key questions will you use to guide your actions of living in the world with inclusive love?

Christians for an Ethical Society (ces.org.au) is a Canberra-based ecumenical forum which seeks to engage with the ethical challenges of the contemporary world, locally, nationally and internationally.