A PILGRIM PEOPLE: FORTY YEARS ON

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INTRODUCTION: FIRST PRESSING OF THE GRAPES

William W. Emilsen

[W]ithout the memory of the dream nothing hoped for would happen at all.[1]

Forty years on is not a long track record. The history of the Uniting Church is equivalent to less than two minutes in the history of the human race and about a week in the history of the Christian church. Our place in the larger scheme of things isn't a very large one; it is dangerously tangential. So, when the church seems to be struggling for purpose and direction and when a general feeling of anxiety prevails, we need to take a fresh look. We could take counsel from the American historian of late medieval and early modern Christianity, David Steinmetz, who called for "taking the long view"—viewing modern developments, as far as possible, through the lens of the Christian past.[2] And if we are troubled by the loss of membership, cutbacks, constant restructuring, retrenchments, ecclesiastical mismanagement, unfulfilled dreams and disappointments, a loss of confidence in the ecumenical vision of the 1960s and 70s, congregations feeling cut adrift and 'For Sale' signs outside churches, we need to view recent developments

[1] Davis, Natalie Zemon, *A Passion for History: Conversations with Denis Crouzet*, ed. Michael Wolfe, Kirksville, Mo:, Truman State University Press, Early Modern Studies 4, 2010, p. 68.

[2] Steinmetz, David C., *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in Historical Perspective*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 147–156.

with a more universal and critical understanding of our history.

Taking the long view is necessary for the church to function effectively in the present, especially in our uncertain and technologically rapidly changing times. History can deepen our understanding of the present. It can remind us of similar situations that have caused problems in the past. It can highlight our mistakes and faithlessness by reminding us of those who, at other times, faced similar problems but who made different, yet wise decisions. It can help us formulate important critical questions, provoke imagination, challenge dogmatic statements, offer wisdom and memories of possibility, dismantle myths, expose hidden agendas and avoid sweeping generalizations. And although historians (with a few exceptions) are not in the business of prophesising or predicting the future as economists and sociologists might, the past offers us essential moments of hope: that happy sense of human possibility—dreaming into a desirable future.

Memory stops the church going mad, especially at a time when measurement and money reign supreme and a culture of forgetting pervades almost every aspect of its life. When corporate memory is faulty or quickly lost, our life is severely impoverished, injustice is let loose and decision-making becomes subject to the whims of the moment. Historians are the memory whisperers. They do the hard work of compiling our book of memories, the custodians of our memory bank. They provide the wherewithal to extend beyond our purely personal memories. They fill our world with reminders. They are like doctors treating amnesia and sometimes, like public prosecutors, challenging those who take refuge in a

"forgettery",[1] that deliberate denial of formal decisions and actions taken in the past. Or, to put it another way, historians provide the *aide-memoires* for each one of us who are called upon to make important practical and political decisions either in council or in community or as individual people of faith deciding how best to live the Christian life. Looking backwards does not extinguish the desire to move forwards; it is immensely freeing, life-giving and fundamentally optimistic. "History", says Oxford historian Theodore Zeldin, "is not a coffin with no escape. On the contrary, it is liberation, a bunch of keys that opens doors to places one never knew existed."[2]

The eighteen papers in these Proceedings were given in June 2017 at the first national conference of the Uniting Church National History Society held in Adelaide. Apart from the name of the conference, "A Pilgrim People: 40 Years On" with its dual focus of celebrating both the birth of the Uniting Church and its 40-year milestone, there is not a strong unifying theme to the collection. This was deliberate. The conference's organisers were determined that the new history society would be comprehensive, involving the participation of all historians at any level of specialisation, interest or place of employment. Anyone who has sought to investigate the past according to recognised criteria of historical scholarship was welcome to present an offering. However diverse

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[1] I owe this expression to Edmund Blair Bolles' *Remembering and Forgetting: Inquiries into the Nature of Memory*, New York, Walker and Company, 1988, p. 180.

[2] Zeldin, Theodore, *The Hidden Pleasures of Life: A New Way of Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future*, Quercus and London, Maclehose Press, 2015, p. 25.

the subject matter of these papers may be, they capture the spirit of the new society which has emerged in response to the widespread conviction that we need to expand the scope of historical interchange to historians across the nation and to all with an interest in the history of the Uniting Church and its predecessor churches.

The coming into being of the Uniting Church National History Society may sit uncomfortably with some, because it raises awkward questions about denominational history. In the afterglow of Church Union in Australia there was considerable prejudice within the Uniting Church against writing denominational history; it was seen as working against the ecumenical spirit of the age. T. V. Philip, a Brisbane-based church historian committed to doing history from an "ecumenical perspective", expressed the prevailing view: "The denominational or confessional approach to history is essentially a communalistic and not a catholic one. It is a distortion of history, exaggerated and often triumphalistic."[1]

Denominationalism has been much maligned in ecumenical circles, and for a generation brought up on Richard Niebuhr's devastating critique of denominations and denominationalism, a society that focuses its attention on a single church like the Uniting Church could fairly be construed as a backward step. Niebuhr portrayed denominationalism as the "moral failure" of the church. The language he used to describe denominationalism leaves little doubt as to his evaluation of it—

[1] Philip, T. V., "Church History in Ecumenical Perspective", in *The Teaching of Ecumenics*, ed. Samuel Amirtham and Cyris H. S. Moon, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1987, pp. 46–47.

evil, secular, divisive, petrification, creeping paralysis, confining, confusion, externalization, capitulation, self-congratulatory, self-confident and self-righteous.[1]

Despite Niebuhr's scathing critique of denominationalism in general and American denominations in particular, there is little evidence that denominational history in Australia is in decline. Even with the rapid expansion of 'religious history' in Australia since the mid-1960s, there have been many fine denominational histories written by professional Australian historians in the past two decades.[2] These national histories, together with the ever-expanding thematic studies of denominations, are an important and permanent feature of religious historiography. They are not necessarily written by denominational 'insiders' and they avoid those triumphal and celebratory aspects that have given denominational history a bad name. It is no accident that the bibliography to James Jupp's major reference work,

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[1] See H. Richard Niebuhr's classic study, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, New York, World Publishing, 1957 and "Institutionalization and Secularization of the Kingdom" in *The Kingdom of God in America*, New York, Harper & Row, 1937, pp. 164–84.

[2] See, for example, Mark Hutchinson, *Iron In Our Blood: A History of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, 1788–2001*, Sydney: Ferguson Publications and the Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 2001; Glen O'Brien and Hilary M. Carey, eds, *Methodism in Australia: A History*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015; Bruce Kaye, ed., *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2002; Ken R. Manley, *From Woolloomooloo to 'eternity': A history of Australian Baptists*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006.

The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia (2009),[1] draws heavily on denominational history studies.

There has also been some important rethinking of the practice of denominational history. Robert Mullin and Russell Richey led the way with their edited work, *Reimagining Denominationalism: Interpretive Essays* (1994)[2], based on papers delivered at conference entitled "The Scholarly Writing of Denominational History: An Oxymoron". The editors state explicitly in the introduction that the purpose of these essays is to "inspire a new appreciation of the fruitfulness of denominational studies"[3] and several of them certainly fulfil that expectation. For example, William R. Hutchison's reflections on denominational histories as autobiographies, sparkles with suggestions; Nancy Ammerman's basic questions about denominations: "Who and What are We studying?" when we study denominations grounds the emerging genre of denominational studies and James Moorhead's treatment of the "mystique of organizational efficiency" in Presbyterianism is very provocative and cries out for comparison with the Uniting Church.

The essays in these Proceedings are mostly on the Uniting Church in Australia with a few on its predecessor churches. They are, to use the American historian Barbara Tuchman's image, like wine made from "the first

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[1], James Jupp ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia*, Port Melbourne, Vic., Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[2] Mullin, Robert Bruce and Richey, Russell E., *Reimagining Denominationalism: Interpretive Essays*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.

[3] Mullin and Richey, *Reimagining Denominationalism*, 7.

pressing of the grapes".[1] For a church described by RMIT University researcher, Desmond Cahill as being "in near free-fall since the 1990s"[2] and lacking visible direction, we hope that they, with their goodly mixture of sweet and sour, serve as an important resource. In William Emilsen's brief explanation of the background and need for a new historical society he cautions about being "stranded in the present", without having any meaningful connection to what has gone before. If history is dismissed as irrelevant, he suggests, then the church places itself fundamentally out of step with the long witness of the Christian tradition. Drawing upon Margaret Bendroth's beautifully written book, *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering* (2013), he reminds the church that Christianity is fundamentally a religion of remembrance and remembering a spiritual practice.[3]

The keynote address by Renate Howe offers some sharp criticism of the current state of the church, stemming largely from what she discerns as an erosion of the church's theological capacity to cope with the practical and theological challenges of a religiously diverse Australian society. Of major concern to her is the massive turning away from the ecumenical movement in all the councils of the church—Assembly, synods, presbyteries, church councils and to congregations. After the high-water mark of Australian ecumenism in 1991 with the

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[1] Tuchman, Barbara, *Practising History*, London, Macmillan, 1983, p. 28.

[2] Cahill, Desmond, "Ecumenical and Multifaith Australia", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia*, ed. James Jupp, Port Melbourne, Vic., Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 635.

[3] Bendroth, Margaret, *The Spiritual Practice of Remembering*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013.

Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, the Uniting Church seems almost marooned. Howe holds before us the memory of the vitality of the Australian Student Christian Movement and the courageous and committed leadership of leaders with ecumenical vision like Davis McCaughey, Colin Williams and George Yule. In doing so, she helps us dream of a different future, one not hamstrung by bureaucratic control and fissiparous tendencies.

Dean Eland is a mission activist. His essay chronicles Australian urban mission in the second half of the twentieth century and demonstrates an awareness of theories of urbanization then unusual among church historians and theologians. The work of Eland and others, dating from the 1960s and 70s, recognises the challenge and rapidly-increasing importance of cities to the church's story. They are forerunners to scholars like Christopher Baker[1] at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom (where there are parallels) who are able to blend cultural analysis, local voices and theological reflection. Central to Eland's essay is the local congregation and its ability to recognise and respond to power relationship within the community.

Mark Hutchinson and Stuart Piggin's publication *Reviving Australia* (1994)[2] brought revivals into the mainstream of religious historiography. In that work

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[1] See Christopher Richard Baker's *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.

[2] Hutchinson, Mark and Piggin, Stuart eds, *Reviving Australia: Essays on the History and Experience of Revival and revivalism in Australian Christianity* (Studies in Australian Christianity, Vol. 3), Sydney, Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994.

Piggin proposed that there needed to be fewer books on revivals and more thinking about the questions raised by revivals.[1] Brian Chalmers' essay, "Methodism and revivalism in South Australia 1838–1939: The Quest for 'Vital Religion'", is part of a larger research project with the same name presented to Flinders University for a PhD. He particularly addresses Piggin's question about the impact of revivals on the church. Using both secular and religious sources, Chalmers explores the contribution of revivalism to conversionary growth and Methodist expansion and concludes that it provided Methodism in South Australia with a significant membership boost.

Throughout all the synods of the Uniting Church, women are underrepresented in leadership. A student of mine once commented that an appropriate title for a paper on women moderators would be "Women in Moderation". Lay woman Ethel Mitchell broke the mould and we are thankful to Alison Head for telling her story. Monash University historian, Graeme Davison, surmises that we need 'heroes' like Ethel Mitchell who inspire and display virtues we most admire. Mitchell was

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[1] Piggin lists the following questions: "What are the defining characteristics of revival? What does the Bible say about revival? Is it as much a Biblical as an historical phenomenon? Is there a theology of revival? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in revival and has the understanding of this role changed over time? Are there identifiable predisposing factors to revivals? What is the role of human agency in revival? Can there be a blueprint for revival? What is the role of prayer in revival? How does revival change the Church? How does it challenge and change the surrounding community and culture?" See Piggin, "Introduction: Revival, Revivalism and Australian Christianity", *Reviving Australia*, p. 6.

strong, direct, gracious and courageous; the need for exemplary individuals, observes Davison, at a time when the traditional Australian resistance to hero-worship is weakening, could well illustrate an anxiety about the moral direction of both the church and the nation.[1]

Margaret Reeson's essay "Extinct Volcanoes" examines the role of missionaries in shaping the Uniting Church. Drawing on her extensive personal knowledge of Australian Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries who served overseas in the 1960s and 70s, she convincingly demonstrates the extraordinary impact and leadership of ex-missionaries on the life of the early history of the Uniting Church.

Robert Renton's case study of two churches in North Essendon "grappling with church union" is a sober reminder of how difficult it is for leaders to change the order of things. Although history is often called upon to help understand social and political change, Renton explores the dynamics preventing change "when change was needed". In short, Renton's essay demonstrates how history can inculcate what might be described as 'ecclesial literacy'.

The risks associated with denominational history alluded to earlier are even more accentuated when historians seek to advance a cause or write about a subgroup or community within the church. Such history is often known as 'identity history' and is particularly vulnerable to anachronism, omission, decontextualization, falsities and self-deception. Yet, even more egregious,

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[1] Davison, Graeme, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, St Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin, 2000, pp. 25, 35.

according to the British historian Eric Hobsbawn, is the temptation to isolate the history of one part of humanity—the historian's own by race, class, sex etc—from the wider context.[1] Such history, Hobsbawn pointedly writes "cannot be good history, though it may be comforting history to those who practise it".[2] Hobsbawn's criticism of the compartmentalisation of 'identity history' poses a particular challenge to Warren Talbot's essay on the LGBTIQ community within the Uniting Church and Bill Harris' on the Deaconate. Talbot is cognisant of the dilemma. He admits that he is writing primarily as an "insider activist", an advocate not as a historian. As a gay man who has been a member of the Uniting Church for forty years, his essay epitomises reasonableness, the ability to forge links and a rejection of narrow, simplistic bigoted attitudes to identity. In a similar vein, Bill Harris writes from personal "experience" about the achievements and challenges of establishing the Deaconate within the Uniting Church. As the first ordained deacon in the Uniting Church in Australia, Harris is well positioned to use his personal story to cast light on the zigzag and sometimes difficult history of the Deaconate.

William Emilsen reflects on the process of writing *Fighting Spirit* (2016), a history of Christianity at Warruwi on South Goulburn Island in Western Arnhem Land. Despite his strong desire to allow the Aboriginal 'voice' to be clearly heard within the history, he soon discovered that other voices needed to be considered as well—the Macassans, Pacific Islanders (Fijians, Samoans and

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[1] Hobsbawn, Eric, *On History*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, p. 276.
[2] Hobsbawn, *On History*, p. 277.

Baduans from the Torres Strait), and the white community (explorers, missionaries, traders and administrators). Emilsen's argues that the vitality of the present-day community on Goulburn Island may largely be attributed to a new wave of thinking about missions in Methodism in the early twentieth century—one of making reparation or doing atonement for the diseases and destruction inflicted on Indigenous societies by European civilisation.

Julia Pitman challenges readers and historians to think more deeply about the church's history on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary. Apart from feelings of pride and achievement, or as an excuse for having a good time, she appeals to the church to become more aware and deliberate in its use of history. Pitman is a staunch believer in the power and practical usefulness of critical history for the well-being and future direction of the church. As we celebrate of this chronological landmark, Pitman insists, it is a time to allow history to question us.

Those institutions—churches, clubs, societies and even towns—that are respectful of their history retain their soul and usually enjoy longevity. Leanne Davis' essay is a gentle tribute to the "the great cloud of witnesses", those saints who went before them at the Playford Uniting Church in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. Remembering the faithful of past generations augurs well for Playford whose long history is firmly rooted in the spirituality, faith and worship of many church communities across the northern Adelaide plains. The saints surround us like stars shining across the ages; they are perennial reminders of who we represent.

In 1986 D'Arcy Wood wrote *Building on a Solid Basis: A Guide to the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in*

Australia, one of the most important books produced on the Basis of Union. In that book he emphasised that the Basis of Union was a "launching pad", and "a point of departure, not a point of arrival".[1] D'Arcy Wood is a national living treasure and we are fortunate to have his personal reflections on the formation of the "final" Basis of Union of 1971 that both he and his father, Harold Wood, were intimately involved in shaping.

Ken Barelli explores Methodism's creative engagement with public policy between 1902 and 1997, particularly through high profile figures such as Irving Benson and the Department of Christian Citizenship. City missions in our large capital cities were another distinctive mark of Australian Methodism. These days some have either disappeared altogether and others have undergone profound transformation over the past four decades. Alison Longworth's history of Wesley Church, Perth, over the past forty years is mostly a story of loss and anxiety as the once proud Central Methodist Mission struggled to adapt to constant restructuring and new mission priorities. Is it history as obituary? No, for she searches out signs of renewal as Wesley Church takes its place as part of the Uniting Church in the City. However, there is diminishment and decline in both Barelli's and Longworth's papers; one is left wondering what will replace the massive public presence that Methodism and city missions once exercised. As my six-year grandson poignantly said when his great grandfather died, "Who will now sit in Poppa's chair?'

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[1] Wood, D'Arcy, *Building on a Solid Basis: A Guide to the Basis of Union of The Uniting Church in Australia*, Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, 1986, p. 4.

Katharine Massam's exploration of what it means to "remember" in the church and the importance of remembering for renewal lies at the very heart of these Proceedings. Massam takes Rowan Williams' thoughtful book *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (2005)[1] and highlights his warnings about two views that he sees as falsehoods—that the past is "simply ourselves in fancy dress" or the past is impossibly inaccessible and irrelevant. Massam posits the view that "history confronts and engages us: authentic memory holds us accountable." For a church like the Uniting Church where there is a commitment to innovation, "the past matters" more than ever. In her analysis of two key foundation documents, the *Basis of Union* and the 1977 *Statement to the Nation*, Massam draws our attention to the way they recorded "the significance of their movement into union as a sign of reconciliation, acknowledging their gratitude for the past and pledging their continued involvement in national affairs". She expresses the hope that sixty years from now at the centenary of the Uniting Church believers will still be aware of the *Basis of Union* and the *Statement to the Nation* and "'hear anew' perhaps, their own story of discipleship and love".

The penultimate essay in this collection comes from Glen O'Brien's playful imagination and takes us into the realm of virtual history. "What if John Wesley was present at the Uniting Church's fortieth birthday celebration? What would he say?", O'Brien asks. He

[1] Williams, Rowan, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (Sarum Theological Lectures), London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005.

channels a new 'quadrilateral' from the founder of Methodism: (i) live in Scripture and on the growing edge of the human situation; (ii) offer Christ or rediscover the compelling message of the good news of Jesus Christ; (iii) embody an optimism of grace; and (iv) engage in mission without losing love for the church. Wesley's insights may not immediately translate into the twenty-first century Australian church, but there is wisdom here, if appropriated, that might prepare the church for the future.

The final offering consists of three reflections on the predecessor churches that came together to form the Uniting Church in Australia. All three acknowledge that the church's heritage must be preserved in order to give a sense of orientation. The practice of remembering our heritage in Congregationalism, Methodism and Presbyterianism and the impact (or lack thereof) of their various strengths on the Uniting Church, has become familiar.[1] At its best this practice is a form of spiritual remembering requiring imagination, trust and courage.

Collectively these essays testify to the profound importance of history for the Uniting Church. Some writers seem to be calling us to action. Others seek to understand the extent and nature of our predicament and how best to overcome it. All of these writers, however, see history as way of discovering hope. At a time when there is enormous upheaval in the church everywhere and rapidly changing social, political and cultural

[1] See, for example, Ian Breward, Geoffrey Barnes and Keith Rowe's chapters in *Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia 1977–1997*, ed. William W. Emilsen and Susan Emilsen, North Parramatta, NSW, UTC Publications, 1997.

changes in society there is need more than ever for hope. The predicament in which we find ourselves is not new. Others in the past have faced similar times and yet there has been renewal. We can learn from the wisdom of history that even during periods of anxiety and decline, a rediscovering of the spirit of our heritage, can enable new things to be born and for the church to embody new and renewed confidence.

William Emilsen, the President of the Uniting Church National History Society, is an Associate Professor of Church History in the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University. William edited *An Informed Faith* (2014), authored *Fighting Spirit* (2016) and is currently writing a biography of the Aboriginal leader Charles Harris.

A NATIONAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY: WHY DO WE NEED ONE AND WHAT HAS BROUGHT US TO THIS POINT?

William W. Emilsen

I want the Uniting Church to discover that the past is essential to our faith and future existence. I want the Church to realise that remembering is a spiritual practice. I don't want the Uniting Church to be 'stranded in the present', without a meaningful connection to those who have gone before.

The Uniting Church is now 40 years old—more or less two generations. Most people cannot remember beyond two generations. As people with a passion for history, we all need to be the rememberers for the church. This is why many of us believe that now more than ever we need a national Uniting Church History Society.

Towards the end of 2014 the idea of establishing a new history body emerged at the National Assembly Historical Reference Committee (NAHRC). This committee was established by the Assembly in 1991 to provide oversight of the Church's archival and historical interests. What had become clear was that we had to change; we needed to do a better job with archives as technology advanced and we needed to do a better job fulfilling the historical aspects of the Assembly's mandate.

For about a year the Committee explored various options for going forward. Eventually, a proposal went to the Assembly Standing Committee that the NAHRC be disbanded and the responsibilities of the Committee be

divided between two new groups: Uniting Archives responsible for archives and a national Uniting Church History Association responsible for the history components in the Assembly's mandate.

The Assembly Standing Committee approved the proposal in November 2015 and Patricia Curthoys and I were given the responsibility of consulting with synod-based historical associations and establishing a steering committee responsible for creating a national Historical Association to be launched in 2017.

There was great energy immediately apparent in our meetings with representatives of the NSW–ACT Historical Society, the Vic–Tas Historical Society and in a teleconference with representatives from the South Australia Historical Society. They generously supported the idea for the new body and each agreed to nominate two people to the steering committee—Glen O'Brien and Bob Evans for NSW, Jenny Bars and Robert Renton for Victoria, and Judith Raftery and Val Canty for South Australia. For some synods there was no existing historical association, so Alison Longworth agreed to represent Western Australia, Wendy Beresford-Maning the Northern Synod, and John Harrison, Queensland. Altogether, the steering committee had eleven people and, most importantly, it represented all synods.

About the same time that the steering committee was established, we received an email from SA proposing a historical conference for the 40th anniversary of the Uniting Church. We agreed to pool resources and work together on the conference with South Australia acting as host for the first of what we hope will become biennial conferences.

In the planning of this conference there has been lots of positive energy. The will to work together and to support one other in this endeavour has been gratifying. The spirit of cooperation has infused the steering committee with confidence and hope that the new Uniting Church National History Society can offer a ray of hope for the future.

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A PILGRIM PEOPLE 40 YEARS ON: THE UNITING CHURCH AS AN EXPERIMENT IN ECUMENISM

Renate Howe

In assessing the Uniting Church of Australia (UCA) as an experiment in ecumenism it is important to consider the role of the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) as a theological influence on the founding of the church. Eminent theologians Professors George Yule and Davis McCaughey were an inspiration for church union in Australia, dominating the more prosaic arguments regarding the practical advantages of union. Forty years on it would seem that the inspiration of the theological arguments for ecumenism has been lost in the difficulties of denominational fusion. Clearly it is time to reinvigorate the theological debate on ecumenism especially given the theological and practical challenges of an emerging and complex multicultural Australia.

The founding of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in 1977 should be celebrated as a pioneering union of three major Protestant denominations—Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational. It is one of the few Protestant interdenominational unions that has been achieved internationally and joins the United Church of Canada which was formed fifty years earlier in 1925 as a union of the Methodist Church, two thirds of the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec.

However, as Andrew Dutney, the leading historian of the UCA, has written, there has been little recognition of the significance of the UCA's formation which has rather been depicted as a marriage of convenience between declining denominations.[1] Dutney concludes that when it comes to the UCA "Australia's churches seem to suffer from a marked inferiority complex" and few have argued for the importance of this distinctive Australian church and its contribution to the wider ecumenical movement.

It is important to recognise the influence of the inter-denominational Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) on the formation of the UCA. Members of the ASCM, established early in the 20th century in Australian universities and affiliated to the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), were participants in the post war ecumenical movement and the founding of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The ASCM involvement in the international ecumenical movement and its leadership for denominational cooperation and union in Australia was driven by determination for a Christian influence in achieving a fair, just and peaceful postwar world.[2] It is important to place the UCA in this broader context as too often it is the administrative and financial advantages that have been emphasised as forces for church union rather than theological imperatives.

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[1] Dutney, Andrew *Manifesto for Renewal: The Shaping of a New Church*, Uniting Church Press.Melbourne,1985, p.5.

[2] Howe, Renate *A Century of Influence; The Australian Student Christian Movement*, UNSW Press, 2009.

The Foundation of the UCA

In recognition of the need for a united post-war Christian witness to shape the post-war world, various models were considered by the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational denominations. It was agreed that this united church should not be just an organisational amalgamation of three denominations but a united church based on an agreed theological Basis of Union. However, it was 1957 before serious negotiations began for an agreed theological vision essential to determine the organisational framework of the new denomination and a further twenty years before agreement was reached on a Basis of Union in 1977.

Those with an ASCM background were theological leaders in these protracted negotiations, especially three professors from the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne—George Yule and Davis McCaughey of the Presbyterian Ormond College and Colin Williams of the Methodist Queen's College. All had been involved in the international ecumenical movement as Protestant churches in a number of countries explored new forms of church ministry and organisation in response to the rapid social and political changes of the post-war world.[1] The involvement of these three professors reinforced the importance for the Australian union that a Basis of Union would be fundamental in determining organisational arrangements.

However, the protracted negotiations over the Basis of Union as a theological vision for the Uniting Church

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[1] Newbigin, Lesslie *Unfinished Agenda; an Autobiography*, SPCK, London 1985.

dragged on over twenty years. The delays were a reality check for those from the SCM involved in the negotiations and who had underestimated the divisive issues of property and forms of governance. As American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr observed, those involved in the postwar negotiations for a peaceful world and new forms of the church were often too idealistic about the realities of power and self-interest and the tensions between emphases on evangelism and social justice.

The first report of the Interchurch Council on Church Union (ICCU) which had been established with a membership of seven representatives of each of the three denominations was published in 1959. This report aimed to set out a theological context for union and drew on the model of the Church of South India Union achieved in 1947. The second ICCU report of 1965 proposed a Basis of Union and a statement concerning scriptural authority. The teaching of the evangelical revival, which had been included in the first report, was revised for the second report reflecting the difficulties of reconciling especially Methodist and Presbyterian theological views. The second report also addressed contentious issues such as the nature of baptism, ordination and the appointment of bishops. This 1965 report was rejected by the Presbyterians and no doctrine of ministry was laid down in the draft Basis of Union completed in 1971. It was 1975 before the final vote of approval for the Basis of Union, incorporating many amendments, was achieved.

However, the ASCM theologians did not all play a leading role in the implementation of the Basis of Union. Colin Williams had returned to the USA, accepting a

professorial appointment at Yale Divinity School. Davis McCaughey's biographer notes that he did not play a significant role in the protracted negotiations over implementing the Basis of Union. However, Professor George Yule and Dr Harold Wood, who had been a member of the Sydney University SCM and was now Principal of Melbourne's Methodist Ladies College, devoted themselves to visiting Methodist and Presbyterian congregations explaining the Basis of Union and building support for the UCA. Harold Wood is described by his biographer Ian Breward as "one of the most influential advocates for reunion in Australian Methodism" and he also indicated that the union of Methodist churches at the turn of the century had predisposed the Methodists to support further union. Wood had urged the federation of the major Protestant churches since 1943 and favoured a federation model rather than an organic union. Federation could have mitigated the legal problems over property that immediately emerged as a major issue for the Presbyterians. Although the federation model was not adopted, Harold Wood was vital in getting the Basis of Union proposal through the Australian Methodist conference especially when Secretary-General in 1954.

Davis McCaughey was elected as the first President of the Uniting Church and his biographer notes his emotion was visible when presiding at the inauguration ceremony in Sydney 1977. As President, McCaughey was the public face of the new church, firmly placing it in the context of the international ecumenical movement. Phillip Potter, a friend and former colleague of McCaughey in the post-war SCM and now General Secretary of the WCC, was an invited guest to the

inauguration—an indication of the contribution international theological leadership made to the formation of the UCA. Lesslie Newbigin of the WCC also attended the inauguration and observed that "it did seem that this was an occasion when old denominational and theological barriers were lowered and trust was created at a deeper level".[1]

Baptism of Fire

Baptism of Fire was the title of John Harrison's book on the early years of the UCA. The SCM theologians had planned the Basis of Union as the guiding document for the new church—this was the vision statement while the Constitution and Regulations would spell out the detail. However, the Basis of Union was not central to the dominant issues faced by the Uniting Church in the early years, as the devastating effects of the 'Death of God' controversy in the 1960s changed the theological environment and led to the collapse of the ASCM. As well as theological issues there were major tensions with the Presbyterian Church over property settlements, especially in NSW, while in Victoria the prestigious Presbyterian secondary schools did not join the Uniting Church. The establishment of a Presbyterian 'continuing' church reflected these theological, financial and property conflicts. As well, holiness congregations, mainly in NSW and Queensland, did not join the new denomination.

Gender issues quickly emerged. Women had been largely absent from the WCC negotiations in Geneva and in the Uniting Church negotiations in Australia.

[1] Newbigin , Lesslie *op.cit.*, p. 174.

Although women were a majority of ASCM members and also the majority of members in denominational congregations they had only a marginal involvement in Australian church union negotiations. Indeed James McCaughey can recall his association of church union with men in suits arriving for meetings in his father's study! No women were appointed to the Joint Commission and no women were among the consultants who assisted the Commission or among the observers from other denominations. Andrew Dutney describes the church union negotiations as dominated by "a very male spirituality" based in the dominant church ethos of the1950s and 60s. It was not surprisingly then, that gender became such a divisive issue in the early years of the UCA.

Where are we now? What is the future for the pilgrim people? What is the future of the Uniting Church as an achievement of the ecumenical movement?

I see the following as among the main issues:

The bureaucratic nature of the UCA today, compared with the vision of a theologically driven church. This is evident in the UCA response to the decline in congregations, an ageing membership and substantial financial problems. Especially in Victoria, the response has been a huge fire sale of church property especially local churches. The sale of churches has been governed by pressing financial reasons but without strategic plans or consultation with congregations. There is little evidence that the UCA is developing community strategies that

would continue a local congregational presence, such as encouraging cooperation and the sharing of resources.

The expansion of the UCA bureaucracy at state and national levels focused on administration, not witness, has been an outcome of a powerful welfare sector, largely financed by state and federal governments, that has become a dominant force in the UCA bureaucracy.

As well there are emerging challenges to UCA membership. The growth of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations reflects a growing holiness movement especially in Queensland but also Melbourne and Sydney. At the other end of the theological spectrum are the Progressive Christians, formed in the USA and especially strong in Melbourne. The broad aims of Progressive Christianity is to seek a community that is inclusive of all people, including but not limited to conventional Christians and questioning sceptics, believers and agnostics, women and men, those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, and those who find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes

In the broader context there are challenges for the Uniting Church in responding to an increasingly multicultural Australia, reflected in the growing non-Christian population of predominantly Muslim background and significant Asian migration. In responding to such challenges the UCA needs to develop a renewed emphasis on the gospel and a more outward looking focus on reaching local communities. As well, better use can be made of the UCA theological institutions which are of high quality but underutilized in meeting the need

for more debate around public policy. These are major challenges but as yet no new generation of theological and strategic leaders has emerged compared with those so influential in the years of the founding of the UCA.

As Andrew Dutney writes, for UCA pilgrims "church union is not a job done but a job beginning".[1]

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[1] Dutney, Andrew *Manifesto for Renewal: the Shaping of a New Church,* Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1986, p. 7.

AUSTRALIAN URBAN MISSION 1960–2000

Dean Eland

Abstract

A legacy is a bequest, a gift from one generation to another and the experience of urban mission activists in the second half of the 20th century anticipated some of the central topics of mission theology and practice in Australia today. The term, 'urban mission' implied an incarnational presence in disadvantaged inner city communities and involved attempts to address long term poverty, injustice and social inequality.

While urban mission in the 1960s and '70s was characterised as 'radical' and 'experimental' its foundational assumptions were based on a commitment to the common good, and involved collaboration with community development advocates and social movements that challenged conservative social policies. Activists adopted an action-reflection methodology with those on the margins and involved an emphasis on a prophetic and liberation calling.

Mission concepts for congregations evolved through 'on the ground' practices, local responses to social policies that threatened the identity of traditional working class and growing multi-faith neighbourhoods. Inner city areas in Melbourne and Sydney became contested spaces as diverse cultural and social groups found their voice and participated in debates about the future of their community. These issues also became the concern of an emerging class of 'trendies', who campaigned to preserve the historic character and amenity of inner city areas.

National networks and resources based on experience were developed to encourage collaboration and shared learning. This paper outlines some of the characteristics of this experiential style of mission and is informative for those practising contextual mission theologies in Australia today.

The Sixties

For mainline churches in Australia the '60s were a time of confrontation and theological debates which focused on being missional congregations in local communities. Conventional and domestic routines of suburban church life in Australia were dependent on family loyalty, social bonding and geographical proximity to the neighbourhood. A number of popular publications, describing the changing relationship between church and society, contributed to a paradigm shift, a growing awareness of a post-Christian, diverse, secular and multi-faith context. This confronting urban reality was very evident in the street life and social composition of disadvantaged urban and industrial areas.

Theological students were influenced by an avalanche of US publications critical of the conventional preoccupations of middle class suburban congregations (Gibson Winter, George Webber and Peter Berger). Harvey Cox's 1965 *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* was a bestseller. UK contributions inviting a renewed engagement with the poor included the ministry of David Sheppard, Bishop of Liverpool, and George Macleod of the Iona Community. This emphasis built on earlier publications that

described the challenge facing the church in industrial and inner urban regions. Methodist Central Missions demonstrated a commitment to disadvantaged communities and superintendents were expected to comment on poverty, unemployment and the homeless, be pastors, evangelists and raise funds at the same time! The pluralist, cross-cultural and multi-faith nature of traditional working class inner city areas of the immediate post-war years anticipated present urban reality. Recognising these trends, the inner city ministry team in Redfern adapted a phrase used by Al Grassby[1] at the opening of the South Sydney Festival in 1974, "what happens in South Sydney today happens in Australia tomorrow".

Context

Working from the ground up, inner city ministry teams adopted community development practices by drawing on theory and learning from practice. This involved exploration of the relationship between gospel and culture, the pastoral cycle of action and reflection. As an inductive process practices were based on partnerships with other community-based groups with a focus on practical, visible and asset-based community building initiatives. Projects were undertaken to address poverty and discrimination, engaged those with a social vision and were founded on the assumption that people on

[1] Al Grassby (12 July 1926–23 April 2005) was an Australian politician who served in the Whitlam Labor Government of 1972–4 as Minister for Immigration. He completed reforms in immigration and human rights, and was often known as the 'father of Australian multiculturalism'.

the margins, residents without a voice would become involved and empowered.

Community development methodologies were also informed by contextual analysis, understanding the implications of demographic, cultural, religious and social trends for local communities. Socio-economic status and class analysis were rich components in understanding communities of location and religious identification was part of the cultural mix.

Applying and interpreting social science disciplines assisted in identifying needs and issues, priorities for community development practices, projects and opportunities. On occasions preoccupation by activists with data and information overload generated analysis paralysis and negativity. Depreciating descriptions of disadvantage also fed despair and encouraged a mood of acceptance. Catalysts for other projects came from being aware of emerging movements of self-determination including the civil rights movement in the US and the Green movement.

In their US study of social ecology, Eiesland and Warner argued that "urban status and class factors direct impact the capacity of local community to develop social capital; a community's ecology provides the basis for its social capital—those features of organisation like networks, norms and social trust that makes civic life possible"[1]. In economically disadvantaged communities

[1] Eiesland, Nancy L. & Warner, R. Stephen, "Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context", in Ammerman, Nancy T. *et al*, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1998, p. 73.

the challenge is to bring people with diverse cultural, language and religious backgrounds together to work for the common good, to encourage trust, reciprocity and affirm shared values.

Pluralist and multifaith social contexts in Australian metropolitan regions today are an invitation to congregations to work with the significance of place and discern ministry openings that arrive with the new social reality. By avoiding or ignoring contextual changes congregations retreat from public life, become focused on their own issues, remain isolated, and thus limit future options.

Becoming a missional church involves an appreciation and engagement with the social environment, the local landscape, and the issues of the day. Conceiving and setting out new and purposeful directions begin by affirming and learning from past experience. Discerning future directions for congregations involves discovering a renewed vocation that comes through conversation, being an imaginative learning community, and taking the next step 'on the road'.[1]

Community development practices

Inner city models of community development ranged across the changing scene from left wing old style confrontation and campaigning, such as sit-ins, resident action and green bans, to the more holistic and systemic reformulation emphasis of the Chicago-based Ecumenical Institute. Reflecting the diverse and conflicting views about the scale and nature of the action, different names

[1] Langmead, Ross, *On the Road: Sixteen songs for Christian community to sing*, published by the author, 1987.

used included 'community building', 'social action', and 'community development'. Some academics debated whether there was such a thing as 'local community' and few local leaders were familiar with this debate. Current community development models include 'Asset-based Community Development' (ABCD) with its emphasis on local collaboration and cooperation.[1]

While social development and community building processes require conceptual models and visionary perspectives, practices demonstrate the art of the possible. Community building initiatives begin by listening to community voices, being pragmatic, discovering what will work on the ground, being aware and ready to act when opportunities emerge. Models of community development often include guidelines and 'how to' lists, steps to take that lead to implementation.

Examples

Some inner city-based projects survive, others exist for a limited time only and still others become more formal community service agencies. Three projects I am familiar with demonstrate that community building projects continue to provide significant opportunities for social bridging.

South Sydney Community Aid (SSCA), Redfern was formed in 1968 and is now a neighbourhood house located in the former Alexandria Town Hall.[2] The SSCA was well timed and involved members of the local joint inner city parish, formerly Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational denominational traditions. With the

[1] See bankofideas.com.au
[2] See ssca.org.au

support of the local government councillors, other churches and group became involved. Its shop-front presence at 142 Regent Street became the base for a range of other projects and programs. Late in 1972 grants to support community building funding from the Whitlam Labor Government was a catalyst to create many other locally based groups.

The Junction Community Centre (JCC), Ottoway in South Australia was formally opened in 1989. Until the early 1980s the buildings and site were the home of a strong neighbourhood Congregational church. Members of the JCC committee included local councillor Rex Searle, Josephite Sister Mary Victory, and Mary Foley, a Child and Family nurse. I represented the local Uniting Church parish. One ministry colleague and some parish members had a preference to sell the site, but others retained their support and they are still involved nearly 30 years later. As a former local I was aware of the church's history, its significance for local families, and the potential it represented to bring different groups together. The working-class suburbs of the Port Adelaide, Ottoway, Rosewater and Pennington developed strong social bonds and were home for many young families. Today, up to 700 people a week are part of the various programs of the centre.[1]

In 1999 a Jesuit report, *Unequal in Life*, was released and ranked New South Wales and Victorian postcodes by a range of social disadvantage indices[2]. A series of press

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[1] See junctioncommunity.org.au/

[2] Vinson, Tony, *Unequal in Life: the distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and New South Wales*, Jesuit Social Services, Richmond Victoria, 1999.

articles followed and reported that the suburbs served by the UC Sunshine Parish Mission were listed among the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria. The suburb of Braybrook was identified as the most disadvantaged community in the state and other neighbouring suburbs of the parish mission were in the top 10%.

At this time the Braybrook Uniting Church of six members were planning to merge with the Sunshine congregation and some became involved in a series of local meetings that led to the formation of the Braybrook and Maidstone Social Action Group in 2001. Again, a wide range of interested government and community groups became involved and worked on plans to address the challenges facing the community. Today a neighbourhood house continues to serve this multi-ethnic and diverse community and provide opportunities for people to experience social bridging.[1]

Each of these associations continues to draw support from residents, local and state government, and in some cases, local churches.

Specific actions, events and community building programs are informed by the awareness of historical trends and social change. While academic debate and research clarifies issues, highlights trends and tracks social change, those who are affected by change express their experience by being involved and taking action. Identifiable 'hands on' projects invite residents to engage with others and take up the challenge.

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[1] See bmnh.org.au

Community development projects affirm the importance of place for congregations aiming to be partners with others on Main Street and in the public square. Renewed community life connects residents from different backgrounds and allows strangers to meet on common ground. By being involved, Sunday congregations connect to their local community. When the doors are open to others, churches become a street presence in the neighbourhood. Members benefit by joining networks and finding opportunities to collaborate and work with those from other cultural and religious traditions. Local public ministry through community engagement represents the face of the congregation in the wider community.

Commitment to community development is one expression of being led by the Spirit to work with God in the world. "For the point of engagement is the interrelationship between the Gospel (what God is up to in the world) and the culture of the West"[1].

Local public theology

Steps taken to build bridges between congregations and communities vary greatly. Some assumptions are based on the hope or expectation that people will join the Sunday worshipping community and grow the church. Some programs emphasise mission as Diakonia[2] and others are based on a commitment to social justice.

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[1] Roxburgh, Alan J., *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World. The New Shape of the Church in our Time.*, Morehouse Publishing, 2015, p. 33.

[2] Diakonia is a Christian theological term from Greek that encompasses the call to serve the poor and oppressed. "Deaconess" and "diaconate" also come from the same root.

For example, the vision statement of Pilgrim Church Adelaide expresses its commitment thus: "We are called by God to be a prophetic witness in the city of Adelaide so that new life and vitality will be generated in our city and in its people".

In articulating a commitment to host communities, Schreiter suggests that "the description of the environment is not something extrinsic to the theological process, but is deeply part of it".[1] Theological reflection involves 'naming the praxis' and becomes the basis for descriptive theology.[2] When congregations discover their narrative and match it with sacred texts and heritage, the process itself reshapes identity and forms strategies for the future.[3] In creating a local contextual theology congregations are being "brought to the truth about our situation and ourselves and through this we are open to hear the gospel anew".[4]

Local public theology practices are practical expressions of conviction. These arise out of a process of reflection on engagement, dialogue with surrounding culture, a genuine give and take where the world is permitted to speak for itself.[5] Hall suggests that in creating a social vision congregations will discover their socio-historical habitat not only as a field to be investigated but partners

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[1] Schreiter, Robert J., *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis, 1985, p. 26
[2] Browning, Don S., *Practical Theology: the emerging field in theology, church and world*, Harper & Row, 1983, p. 31.
[3] Schreiter, Robert J., *op.cit.*,, p. 38.
[4] Roxburgh, Alan J., *op.cit.,* p. 59.
[5] Hall, Douglas John, *Thinking the Faith*, Fortress Press, 1991, p. 79.

in discernment and therefore a contributor to the theological task itself.[1]

The urban setting involves working with people who have multiple belongings, a hybridised context in a rapidly changing society that has altered a once stable habitat. Ministry in this context of radical pluralism and social diversity reflects the gospel practice of welcome, hospitality, and discovers that local communities of nations are a gift. The new Australian urban setting involves making links and working in complex contexts and invites an affirmation to be a multicultural church. Adopted by the UCA at its fourth Assembly,[2] this commitment was a first step in building bridges between established churches and new ethnic communities.

A general or universal theology describes the profound ways in which the people of God have been formed and led in history. For congregations, the specifics of social and generational change in time and place are generative and the historical, social and cultural context is "the situation given by God".[3] A particular local public theology provides a framework and is a response to being "brought to the truth about our situation and ourselves and through this we are open to hear the gospel anew".[4]

Good news is the product of an ongoing dialectic, an evolving conversation and encounter between cultural context, church and gospel. Objectivity, research, theological reflection and theoretical debate are appropriate

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[1] *Ibid*, p. 80.
[2] *Minutes of the Fourth Assembly*, May-June 1985, p. 180.
[3] Browning, Don S., *op.cit.*, p. 78.
[4] Roxburgh, Alan J., *op.cit.*, p. 59.

for generalised flows or threads of conversations across the whole church. Day to day encounters and community engagement, however, inform and ground this process and local theology places high priority on the facts of the situation and on experience.[1] Gospel meaning and interpretation emerge from actions taken in specific contexts.

The cycle of action–reflection has the potential to create a vision for the future, hope born of good news, a hermeneutic that calls members to imagine new possibilities. The path ahead is not imposed from above but is generated from below, in praxis, a discernment process that is systemic, comprehensive and signifies new beginnings.

Mission studies are creative as they affirm and take into account the day to day experience of local congregations. Ministry and mission are both engagement and reflection and work with recurring vocational questions, 'Could I? Should I?'[2] By following Christ into community congregations take to the road and discover again that they are called to share with God who is already at work in the world. Congregations in urban settings discern their vocation by finding new identity in the context of multiple, hybrid and competing identities. Wayside theology is Pentecostal, and celebrates social diversity, and mission becomes incarnate and grounded in reality when members are involved in welcoming the stranger

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[1] Schreiter, Paul, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

[2] Morisy, Ann, *Journeying Out: A New Approach to Christian Mission*, Morehouse, London, p. 199.

and taking steps to bridge social difference through local community development projects.

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METHODISTS AND REVIVALISM IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1838–1939: THE QUEST FOR 'VITAL RELIGION'

Brian Chalmers

Abstract

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Methodism was the most vigorous religious group in South Australia with the largest body of regular church attenders and Sunday school enrolments. A handful of Methodists were present at the commencement of the colony in 1836 and by 1900 self-described Methodists comprised 25 per cent of the colony's population, and hovered around the same figure through to 1939. This paper explores the contribution of revivalism to conversionary growth and institutional expansion in the period from 1838, with the first recorded religious revival, to 1939. It rests on a conviction that the study of revivalism within Methodism has received too little attention from historians. It argues that revivalism provided the Methodist churches with an effective methodology for conversionary growth in the quest for 'vital religion'—a religion of the heart.

The paper, which utilises the evidence of known revival activities as recorded in both religious and secular sources, is in three parts. Part One examines the place of revivalism from 1838 to 1865, with particular reference to the foundational elements within South Australian Methodism. Part Two covers the period from 1866 to 1913 and examines the contribution of specialist revivalists of international or Australian origin, who conducted

large-scale missions in Adelaide, alongside the revivals that occurred in rural and suburban Methodist circuits as the result of local evangelistic preaching. Part Three, which covers the period from 1914 to 1939, when there was diminished revival activity, examines how traditional revivalism adapted to various challenges, both intellectual and internal. The paper concludes that revivalism was far more extensive than previously thought, and was a significant factor in the numerical growth of South Australian Methodism during the period studied.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Methodism was the most vigorous religious group in South Australia with the largest body of regular church attenders and Sunday school enrolments. A handful of Methodists were present at the commencement of the colony in 1836. By 1900, self-described Methodists comprised 25 per cent of the state's population, and hovered around the same figure through to 1939.

This paper explores the contribution of revivalism to conversionary growth and institutional expansion in the period from 1838, with the first recorded religious revival, to 1939 demonstrating that revivalism provided the Methodist churches with an effective methodology for conversionary growth in the quest for 'vital religion' – a religion of the heart.[1] In the closing section of the

[1] This paper is based on my research. See "Methodists and Revivalism in South Australia, 1838–1939: the Quest for 'Vital Religion'" (PhD Thesis, Flinders University, 2016).

paper, conclusions presented are drawn mainly from the thesis.

Revivalism and Evangelicalism

The allied partnership of religious revival and evangelicalism was common within British and North American Evangelicalism.[1] The revival of religion in all its forms was always at the centre of evangelicalism.[2] According to the eminent historian of Evangelicalism, David W. Bebbington, evangelicals in the late nineteenth century "continued to display much of the vigour they had inherited from the Evangelical Revival. They were still concerned above all with the cultivation of vital Christianity".[3]

In nineteenth-century Australia, revivalism was a significant feature of the growth of Methodism in other colonies as well. In New South Wales and Queensland, the Conference sanctioned and commended such activity to the circuits in its charge.[4] David Bollen observed that Methodists in New South Wales were the most determined and successful of all denominations in revival activity.[5] Revivals produced conversions, and

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[1] Bebbington, David W., *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*: *The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 2005; Noll, Mark A., *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, IVP, Leicester, 2004; Wolffe, John, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney,* Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, 2006.

[2] Noll, *op.cit*., p. 69.

[3] Bebbington, *op.cit*., p. 235.

[4] Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Proceedings of the New South Wales and Queensland Conference*, 1877, 52-54; 1884, 22.

[5] Bollen, J.D., *Religion in Australian Society: An Historian's View*, Leigh College, Enfield NSW, 1973, pp. 27-28.

subsequent growth in membership, though they were often uneven, sporadic, and affected by economic and other factors.[1] Within South Australian Methodism, revivalism was an essential component of 'vital religion'. In the nineteenth century it was the method of choice to initiate conversions as the entry-point to a life of holiness, an essential component of the spread of Methodist piety. For John Wesley, conversion led on to holiness. In Wesley's words, the goal was to "bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and, with all your power, to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord".[2] On the wider evangelical canvas, conversion was also important. Bebbington has characterised evangelicalism as 'conversionist', asserting that "conversion was the one gateway to vital Christianity".[3] In this paper the use of terms such as 'vital religion', 'revival', 'revivalism', 'conversion' and 'moral reform', are defined as follows.[4]

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[1] Walker, R.B., 'The Growth and Typology of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New South Wales 1812-1901', *Journal of Religious History,* December 1971, pp. 337-338.

[2] Wesley, John, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd edition, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), viii, p. 310. See also, the *Handbook of the Laws and Regulations of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church*, 1877, p. 78 for the inclusion of Wesley's words.

[3] Bebbington, D.W., *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, p. 7.

[4] The definitions of 'vital religion', 'revival', and 'conversion' contain representative elements included in statements made by various Methodists and published in denominational periodicals. See for example, *South Australian Bible Christian Magazine*, February 1868, p. 57; August 1874, p. 4; *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 14 December 1923, p. 3; 30 January 1925, p. 3; 18 February 1925, p. 3; 24 July 1925, p. 3; 20 May 1927, p. 1; 2 November 1928, p. 14; 22

- Vital Religion

A religion of the heart initiated by individual conversion, which sought to embed Protestant morality into both the private and public spheres of life.

- Revival

A time of increased spiritual intensity in which conversions take place and believers are revitalised in their faith.

- Revivalism

Evangelical activism to produce 'a revival [which] is the result of the *right* use of the appropriate means'.[1]

- Conversion

The personal acceptance and assurance of justification by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ for salvation.

- Moral Reform

Self-conscious, organised efforts by Methodists to change moral values and to modify people's patterns of behaviour accordingly.[2]

February 1929, p. 7; 18 August 1933, p. 4; 12 August 1938, p. 4. On 'vital religion' see also Bradley, Ian, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians*, 2nd edition, Lion, Oxford, 2006.

[1] Latham, Steve, "'God came from Teman': Revival and Contemporary Revivalism", in Andrew Walker and Kristin Aune, eds., *On Revival: A Critical Examination*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle, Cumbria, 2003, p. 175. Finney, Charles G., *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, E. J. Goodrich, Oberlin, Ohio, 1868, p. 13. This is the fundamental premise of Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*.

[2] Adapted from the definition of 'moral reform' by the British historian, Roberts, M. J. D., in *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association*

The definition of moral reform encapsulates the often-repeated Methodist desire to 'Christianise Australia', which included alignment to Methodist morality.[1] Hence, for many, revivalist conversionism was not the path to inert moralism, but the initiator for an activist humanitarianism inspired by the gospel. John Wesley's two emphases of both personal and societal transformation have been described as his "functional holistic model of salvation".[2]

Ian Bradley's *The Call to Seriousness*, which analyses the effects of the Evangelical movement upon Victorian England, provides a nuanced account of 'vital religion' as distinct from a plurality of religious topics more in keeping with a generalised evangelicalism.[3] Bradley locates the origins of 'vital religion' within the Evangelical Revival of mid-eighteenth-century Britain. He emphasises the "doctrine of conversion at the heart of Evangelical theology", but limits his treatment to the efforts made by Evangelical clergy to revitalise the Church of England, and omits any reference to the practice of revivalism and its ability to initiate conversion. Having made the claim for the revivalist origins in what the "founding fathers of

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and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 1.

[1] See for example, the statement by the Rev. W. F. James to 'Christianise Australia' included in the annual address to the Bible Christian Conference in 1890. *South Australian Bible Christian Monthly*, August 1890, pp. 227-236.

[2] "Reclaiming Holistic Salvation: A Continuing Wesleyan Agenda", in Nathan Crawford, Jonathan Dodrill and David Wilson, eds., *Holy Imagination: Thinking About Social Holiness*, Emeth Press, Lexington KY, 2015, pp. 41-54.

[3] Bradley, Ian *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians,* Lion Books, England, 2006.

the Evangelical Revival…described as "'vital religion'", Bradley acknowledges the followers of John Wesley as those who embraced the 'new vital religion' and who became known as Methodists.[1] As Bradley situates 'vital religion' in the context of the Evangelical Revival's "reaction against the worldliness and complacency of eighteenth-century England", he, therefore, defines 'vital religion' variously as a "movement with the characteristics of Evangelicalism", and as an "intense, urgent, all-consuming faith" which "appealed wholeheartedly and unashamedly to the emotions". Furthermore, Bradley identifies a number of characteristics of 'vital religion', including its introspective nature and animating power, which encouraged seriousness of purpose, personal stewardship, self-denial, personal usefulness, and a lifestyle governed by its evangelical orientation.[2] These elements were present in South Australian Methodism.

Arnold Hunt, author of *This Side of Heaven*, the standard history of the Methodist Church in South Australia, also locates the origins of 'heart-religion' in the Evangelical Revival.[3] Although Hunt's narrative is compelling, he downplays the importance of conversionism as the gateway to 'vital religion', and therefore, omits to draw the linkage between conversion and revivalist preaching as the mainstay of Methodist expansion and influence.[4] How extensive was South Australian

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[1] Ibid., pp. 11-12; 17.

[2] Ibid., pp. 15-28.

[3] Hunt, Arnold D., *This Side of Heaven: A History of Methodism in South Australia*, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide,1985, p. 1.

[4] Others to write on or reference Methodist revivalism and conversionism in South Australia include Evans, Robert, *Early Evangelical*

Methodist revivalism, and how did revivalist conversions contribute to Methodist expansion?

Revival Statistics, 1838–1939

In the period 1838 to 1939 there were 574 revival-type events within Methodist churches or events with which Methodists were associated. Revivals, whether of the more spontaneous type or as the result of planned measures, a distinction noted by Calvin Cotton, an American proponent of revivals in the 1830s,[1] occurred in both forms within South Australian Methodism. Of the 574 revival-type events identified, unplanned or spontaneous revivals accounted for 1.4% (8) of all revivals, while those of a planned or deliberate nature accounted for 87.6%. For another 11 per cent of all revivals, it was not possible to determine whether they were spontaneous or planned.[2]

While the Methodist or Evangelical Revival was the touchstone for the movement's revivalist ethos, it is

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Revivals in Australia: A Study of Surviving Published Materials about Evangelical Revivals in Australia up to 1880, Robert Evans, Hazelbrook, NSW, 2000); *Evangelism and Revivals in Australia 1880-1914*, Robert Evans, Hazelbrook NSW, 2005, and *Early Revivals in South Australia* (Robert Evans, Hazelbrook, 2016; Breward, Ian, "Methodists", in Jupp, James, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 404-415. Reference to revivals at p. 407; Hilliard, David, "Methodism in South Australia", in O'Brien, Glen and Carey, Hilary M., eds., *Methodism in Australia: A History*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham, Surrey, 2015, pp. 59-74, at p. 61; O'Brien, Glen, "Australian Methodist Religious Experience", pp. 167-179, at pp. 170-173.

[1] Kent, John, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism*, Epworth Press, London, 1978, pp. 17-18.

[2] Percentages calculated from thesis data in Appendix 1.

clear that petition and the use of planned measures for revival governed its practice within South Australian Methodism. Although the majority of the spontaneous revivals occurred in the colony's first forty years, by the mid-1870s, the planned event had gained widespread acceptance. According to editor of the *Bible Christian Magazine*: "The blessedness of this [planned revival] is not lessened because it may be the fruit of special effort and striving after a state of things. And none of us will quarrel with it where it is the regular rather than the extraordinary course of church life".[1] If holier living was the outcome of a revival, then this was more important than the type of revival that produced it. Overall, Methodists looked for revival in the smallest spiritual provision.

Where did the revivals occur? In the period 1838 to 1858 there were 13 revival events—of which nine occurred in Adelaide and four in the country. This ratio reflected the priority given to settlement in or near the city before significant rural expansion occurred. However, by the late 1850s, Methodist churches followed population growth into the rural regions. As Methodism was well suited to the demands of a frontier, rural, and expanding economy, the ratio of country to city revivals was at least 3:1 throughout the nineteenth century and increased to 5:1 between the first and second world wars. Methodist revivalism flourished in the country, interpolated into the rhythm and quiet tenor of an agrarian seasonal lifestyle, but languished by comparison in the city with its emergent cosmopolitan lifestyle. The city of Adelaide may have predominated as the commercial, trading, and

[1] *South Australian Bible Christian Magazine*, August 1874, p. 4.

cultural centre of the state, but it was in the country where Methodist revivalism was most effective.[1]

Comparing Methodist membership as a percentage of the total population, we find that in the period 1860 to 1939, the figure oscillated in the range 4.1 to 4.7. This exceeds the British figure of around 2.5 to 2.8, but is less than the American figure of 4 to 6% over the period 1830 to 1870.[2]

To what extent did revivalist-conversions contribute to membership growth? The degree to which conversionary activity fuelled membership growth varied considerably in the period (see Table 1). By comparing the number of conversions as a percentage of membership growth, from 1838 to 1865, less than half (45.6 per cent) of conversions accounted for the growth in membership, while from 1866 to 1901, there were two and a half times more recorded conversions than membership growth. As Methodism moved beyond its first generation to its second and third, conversionary activity provided the necessary membership and adherent pools to service institutional expansionary growth and community influence. It was an attractive strategy—to promote general societal well-being, usually but not limited to Sabbath observance and temperance, as it grew numerically.

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[1] Thesis data in Appendices 1 and 5.

[2] The South Australian Methodist figure for 1881 is outside the stated range at 3.4%, when the census years only are included in the range. For the British and American graph, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1978, p. 48.

From 1902 to 1913, there were fewer conversions recorded than new members welcomed (88.6%), while from 1914 to 1939, the number of conversions accounted for less than a half (45.6%) of the membership increase.[1] Clearly, the doctrine of salvation that insisted on the efficacy of personal conversion as the gateway for 'vital religion' was not the only route to acquire church membership. To work for revivalist-conversions and thereby increase the numerical size of Methodist churches was considered by some as the 'barque of Methodism'.[2]

The relative 'converting activity' within a Methodist Church over the period 1840 to 1937 is shown at Table 2. The graph shows a periodic overall Annual Conversion Index for selected years. The annual figure was calculated by dividing the number of annual revivalist-conversions by the Methodist membership for each year. It provides a rudimentary but helpful measure of revivalist-conversionary activity, but does not suggest what internal or external factors were favourable to revivalist success.[3] The higher the index, the greater the

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[1] See Table 1.

[2] Blamires W.L. and Smith, John B., *The Early Story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria*, Wesleyan Book Depot, Melbourne, 1886, p. 95.

[3] A more detailed approach using an 'Evangelism Index' similar to a 'Conversion Index' as a dependent variable and with fifty-four independent variables consisting of the internal characteristics of churches and the external characteristics of the surrounding communities, utilising factor and multiple regression analysis was undertaken by Curtis D. Johnson to study New York State evangelism in the 1830s. See Curtis D. Johnson, "Supply-Side and Demand-Side Revivalism? Evaluating the Social Influences on New York State Evangelism in the 1830s", *Social Science History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1995),

number of converts relative to annual membership for selected years. The graph demonstrates that revivalist-conversionary activity was relatively more significant in the period from colonial settlement until the late 1890s than it was afterwards. Revivalism established itself early and made a significant contribution in the establishment of 'vital religion'. It accords with the observation of Mark Noll that "evangelicalism always involved more than the revival of religion but, from the beginning, both revivals and the longing for revival were always central".[1]

From 1838 to 1939 Methodist revival activity can be arranged in three distinct periods:

Revivalism, 1838–1864

Just eighteen months after the colony was founded and three months after the first stone building was opened for public worship in March 1838, a Methodist love-feast was held on 3 June 1838, conducted by local preacher Jacob Abbott.[2] What followed was a "long series of

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pp. 1-30. A similar study utilising the Conversion Index of Appendices 2 and 3 would prove worthwhile. A study of local revivals that moves beyond the internal characteristics of churches, and examines some of the social, economic, cultural, and intellectual forces at work is Bebbington, David, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

[1] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 69.

[2] 'Love feasts' were occasions for fellowship and testimony during which members drank water from a common cup and ate pieces of bread from a plate passed around. Based on a rite of the early church and attended by active members only, at least in the early years, meetings created an atmosphere of mutual trust and support.

blessed revivals, in the course of which many people were added unto the Lord".[1] A Methodist society formed in the absence of a Wesleyan minister established regular ministrations.[2] Soon after his appointment to Adelaide by the British Methodist Conference of 1840, John Eggleston (1813-1879), known as an energetic 'soul-saving' preacher, reported that, "A blessed revival of the work of God broke out. Backsliders were reclaimed, sinners were converted, and many believers were enabled to testify to the possession and enjoyment of perfect love".[3] Hence revivalism was located in the earliest years of colonial settlement.

True to its inheritance of John Wesley's sense of urgency for the salvation of souls and the Arminian understanding that grace was available for all to receive, Methodist revivalism soon followed the settlers to the rural areas.[4]

The practice lasted until around the end of the nineteenth-century. See Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, pp. 162-163.

[1] Colwell, James, ed., *A Century in the Pacific*, Charles H. Kelly, London, 1914, p. 305.

[2] *Ibid,* pp. 303-305.

[3] On Eggleston, see Howe, Renate, "Eggleston, John 1813–1879", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 4, p. 132. James Bickford, *Christian Work in Australasia: With Notes on the Settlement and Progress of the Colonies,* Wesleyan Conference, London, 1878, p. 142.

[4] Preaching places taken from the plan for the March quarter in 1841 show the Adelaide–country spread: Gawler Place, North Adelaide, Franklin Street, Emigration Square, Bowden (Adelaide or nearby), Thebarton, Islington, Payneham, Walkerville, Onkaparinga Road, Carrington, Reedbeds, Exwell, New Port and Albert Town, Balhannah and Nairn, Craike, Crafer's Tiers, Longbottom, Willunga, Mackgill, and Kensington (village and rural). These preaching places were serviced by Eggleston and 25 local preachers. Haslam, James, *History of Wesleyan Methodism in South Australia: From its Commencement to its Jubilee,* South Australian Methodist Historical

Perhaps this is best illustrated in the work of Samuel Keen (1818–1872), Bible Christian minister on the Gawler Plains in the seven years from 1853 to 1860.[1] The circuit stretched from Port Gawler on the Gulf of St Vincent to Mount Torrens in the Adelaide Hills, with the highest concentration of settlers and farmers on the Gawler Plains centred on Angle Vale some 30 kilometres north of Adelaide. Armed with a thorough knowledge of the Bible, a zealous physicality, and an "insatiable passion for souls", Keen often travelled up to 200 kilometres per week throughout the region. He established 15 churches and constructed more than a dozen chapels.[2] As a chapel builder in the colony, there were few equals. It is said of Keen that "he used to keep a number of foundation stones in his house ready for use at the first opportunity".[3] During these years, the Gawler Plains mission resembled an "almost continuous revival" as most of the chapels experienced seasons of revivalist

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Society, Adelaide, 1958), p. 72. There were no chapel buildings in the village and rural areas. Worshippers met in whatever structures were available to them—mainly homes and public places.

[1] On Keen, see Arnold D. Hunt, 'The Bible Christians in South Australia', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 10 (1982): p. 20; Arnold D. Hunt, *The Bible Christians in South Australia*, 2nd edition, Uniting Church Historical Society, Adelaide, 2005, pp. 7–8. Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, pp. 67-68. Edwin A. Curnow, *Bible Christian Methodists in South Australia 1850-1900*, Uniting Church South Australia Historical Society, Black Forest, 2015.

[2] Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, p. 67; *South Australian Bible Christian Monthly*, December 1892, pp. 174-175; February 1893, pp. 210-212. Keen's letters to the English Bible Christian Missionary Committee reporting his work in the colony, and published in the English *Bible Christian Magazine*, were often included in the *South Australian Bible Christian Magazine*.

[3] *Christian Weekly and Methodist Journal*, 13 April 1900, p. 4.

enthusiasm.[1] It is estimated that Keen secured at least 319 conversions in his seven years on the Gawler Plains. He made a significant contribution to Bible Christian membership that stood at 1,215 by 1860.

The most significant revivals to occur in the period 1838 to 1864 were the Burra and Central Hill Country revivals of 1858 to 1860. In 1858, with the benefit of significant Cornish immigration (many of the migrants were Methodists) to work the copper mines and first-generational expansionary zeal, Burra Methodism erupted in a momentum of revivalist activity that continued through 1859. This activity was the catalyst for localised revivals in the Central Hill Country during 1860.

Beginning in 1858, the revival that affected Burra possessed revivalist roots that extended back to the late 1840s. Annual revivals were part of the regular rhythm of Burra church life, particularly among the Methodist denominations. What was unique about the outbreak of religious enthusiasm in 1858 was its intensity and pervasive nature. All the Methodist churches experienced revivals, characterised by outbursts of praise, emotionalism, seekers of mercy, and conversions. Scenes of spontaneous singing broke out in the township, and men in the mines became overwhelmed with emotion. Hotels lost many of their customers and 500 conversions took place. The revival affected the whole community.

The Burra revival of 1859 occurred in the context of a colony-wide movement in which almost every Methodist circuit underwent some aspect of revivalist activity. Of

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[1] E. A. Curnow, *His Spirit Comes*, Uniting Church Historical Society, Adelaide, 1997, p. 60.

six-months duration, the Burra revival secured an estimated 500 conversions. To accommodate the increased congregations, a number of churches underwent building programmes, the most noticeable of which was a new church erected by the Bible Christians in 1859 capable of seating 600.

In 1860, the Burra revivals of 1858 and 1859 spread to the townships of Kapunda, Watervale, Auburn, Angaston, Mintaro, Leasingham, and Undalya. Kapunda recorded 200 conversions and an additional 200 members, while Auburn welcomed an additional 214 members by the end of 1861. Overall, for the three years, the revivals produced an estimated 1,200 conversions and 664 new members.

Revivalism, 1865–1913

The second period of revivalist activity began with the visit of William 'California' Taylor, American Methodism's much travelled international missionary to South Australia from July to December 1865, as part of his two and a half years in Australia. His visit was the first by an overseas revivalist. In the best traditions of rugged Methodist individualism, Taylor exemplified a "remorseless pragmatism and sheer optimism about what could be accomplished by a zealous minority".[1] This is seen in

[1] Hempton, David, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005, p. 168. Taylor preached to 5,000 at the opening services of Kent Town Wesleyan Jubilee Church (Adelaide). He conducted numerous revivalist meetings throughout South Australia during his six-month visit. At the end of 1865 the Wesleyans reported an increase of 353 members with 724 on trial. See thesis Appendix 1. Taylor claimed 6,000 conversions during his visit to Australia. See William Taylor, *Christian Adventures*

the frequency and extent of localised revivalism throughout South Australia in the period 1866 to 1913. Of the 448 revival-type events from 1866 to 1913, 99 occurred in Adelaide or within five kilometres of the city, and produced 5,286 converts. The remaining 349 occurred in rural townships and produced 16,355 converts. Of the country townships that reported multiple revivals, Burra/Kooringa recorded the most with 12 revival-type events in the period, six of which occurred after the copper mines closed in 1877 (1879, 1881(2), 1882, 1894, 1905). The large majority of the 448 revival-type events were of a localised nature.

Throughout the period, local revivals led by circuit preachers, visiting Methodist preachers, lay preachers, Conference evangelists, or the occasional interstate or overseas preachers were the mainstay of Methodist revivalism. It was widely believed and hoped that the specialist revivalist would bring a spiritual injection of religious fervour claiming new converts and testimonies of growth in holiness. Revivalists included the gospel-temperance evangelist Matthew Burnett (1880–1882), Emilia Baeyertz (1883), David O'Donnell (Wesleyan) and C. Tresise (Bible Christian)—both appointed as their first respective Conference evangelists (1887), Bible Christian "Lady Evangelists" (1891–1897), students from Hope Lodge and Angas College (1899–1907), the Barrett Brothers (1910s), Dr. W.G. Torr (1910s), and Sister Lily Cowmeadow (1910–1912).

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in South Africa, Nelson and Phillips, New York, 1876, pp. 2-3, 94-98, 451.

Of particular note during the period was the work of the 'Lady Evangelists'. The Bible Christians in South Australia, along with the Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists, never had female ministers in their connexions. The Bible Christians were the only branch of Methodism to use female evangelists, and then only sparingly, although the Wesleyans utilised the services of Misses Nesbit and Green in 1894-1895, as well as Misses A. and H. McLennan, in 1894. Prior to the 1890s, Serena Thorne, who had arrived in the colony as an evangelist in 1870, was the only female evangelist.[1]

From 1891 to 1897, the Bible Christians utilised what they termed 'Lady Evangelists' to conduct short-term revival-type missions.[2] Women often worked in pairs, moved from circuit to circuit at the invitation of the circuit minister, and quickly established their worth in securing conversions. Their results were impressive. The Lady Evangelists led a total of 34 revival/evangelistic missions from 1891–1897, and of these, 28 were conducted in Bible Christian Circuits over the seven-year period and six in Wesleyan Circuits in the years 1894 (5) and 1895 (1). These missions accounted for a total of 786

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[1] Among the Bible Christians, a few women preached, but were not deemed 'evangelists'. For Mrs James Way, see *South Australian Bible Christian Magazine*, August 1876, p. 277; for Mrs James Roberts, see *Christian Weekly & Methodist Journal*, 14 August 1885, p. 4.

[2] On the employment and history of women preachers in the English Bible Christian Connexion, see Lloyd, Jennifer M., "Women Preachers in the Bible Christian Connexion", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 36, no. 3 (Autumn 2004), pp. 451-481. On the Bible Christian women preachers in South Australia, see Hunt, *This Side of Heaven*, pp.v129-130; *The Bible Christians in South Australia,* Uniting Church Historical Society, 2005, pp. 17-18.

Bible Christian converts and 602 Wesleyan converts.[1] All of the reported Wesleyan conversions (602) occurred in the one year, 1894, the year Conference sanctioned the employment of Lady Evangelists by the Home Mission Committee on the condition that no "liability be incurred by the Committee".[2] There is no evidence to suggest that, apart from this one year, the practice of female itinerant evangelists occurred within Wesleyan Methodism in the late nineteenth-century; the self-supporting criterion was sufficient reason for its limited appeal. Importantly, their work in the 1890s advanced the acceptability of female preaching.

The period is also noted for the introduction of large scale revivalism led by international evangelists. Mass evangelism emerged in 1865 with the visit of William 'California' Taylor. Others who led revivalist missions up until the First World War included: Henry Varley (1878), T. Houston and H.T. Fry (1885–1886), R.T. Booth (1886), Rodney 'Gipsy' Smith (1894, 1926), Thomas Cook (1894), C.H. Yatman (1899), W.E. Geil (1902), Ada Ward (1907), J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles M. Alexander (1909, 1912), and Charles Reign Scoville (1912). They made large scale revivalism fashionable.

The fifteen years before the First World War was a time of intensified local revival activity, interspersed with visits by the occasional American evangelist. The contribution made by Methodist lay agency to advance the cause of vital religion through revivalist means was particularly significant. The Americans included C. H.

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[1] See thesis Appendix 1 for years 1891-1897.

[2] Australasian Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Minutes of South Australia Conference*, 1894, vol. 1, SLSA SRG 4/1/1.

Yatman, under the auspices of the YMCA (1899), W. Edgar Geil (Simultaneous Mission 1902), Dr J. Wilbur Chapman and Charles M. Alexander (1909 and 1912), and Charles Reign Scoville (1912) at the invitation of the Churches of Christ. Conversions recorded for these evangelistic events include: Yatman (1,076), Geil (a few hundred), Chapman-Alexander (800 in 1909 and 2,000 in 1912), and Scoville (924), making a total of 5,000.[1] The Chapman-Alexander missions concluded the second period of revivalist activity that commenced in 1865 with the visit of the Rev. William 'California' Taylor, the first international revivalist to visit South Australia. The large-scale evangelistic missions undertaken in the twelve years before the First World War were the culmination of nearly half a century of mass revivalism in the Methodist churches. It was the end of a period during which Methodists still valued the relative importance of mass revivalism.

Although each of these American-led evangelistic events exhibited, to some degree, the temperament and style of the missioner, they shared some mutual features that distinguished them from the local counterpart. They were non-denominational in character—with representatives of the main Protestant denominations on the organising committees (apart from the Churches of Christ-sponsored Scoville mission). They centred on the state's largest population base in Adelaide, although the second Chapman-Alexander mission of 1912 travelled to major regional centres such as Petersburg, Broken Hill, Port Pirie, and Mount Gambier. Furthermore, they utilised the most accessible and largest of public

[1] Conversion figures from thesis Appendix 1.

meeting facilities. In this way, the missions aimed for maximum possible attendance, a large meeting-type atmosphere, and benefited a mainly city population. These five missions, spread over twenty weeks, accounted for 5,000 out of 8,636 conversions (58 per cent) obtained in the fifteen-year period.

On the other hand, although local revivalism shared a common characteristic of short-term duration—from a few days to a few weeks, they were mainly denominational in character; local in extent—whether rural or suburban; utilising church facilities; and being either self-or-denominationally funded. In this way, the missions aimed at maximum, concentrated, small meeting atmosphere, to a mainly rural population. The 118 local revivalist events, spread over 15 years, accounted for 3,636 out of 8,636 conversions (42%). Judged against the criteria of efficiency, attendance, and impact, the internationally-led event stands apart. However, when assessed against geographical community reach, local impact, and maintaining a Methodist conversionist ethos, the local revivalist event suited rural townships and regions.[1] One obvious feature of local revivals in this period is the extent of lay leadership. Of the 118 recorded revivalist events, 77 were lay-led and produced 2,780 converts, whilst ordained ministers led 41 events that produced 856 converts, a ratio of more than three to one in favour of lay-led conversions.[2] Lay-led revivalism emerged as an answer to the intellectual challenges of the era.

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[1] Conversion figures from thesis Appendix 1.

[2] Conversion and other date from thesis Appendix 1.

Mass revivalism, alongside of localised spiritual awakenings, enabled Methodism to continue to differentiate itself from nominal forms of Christian association. The essential characteristic of revival activity was instantaneous conversion induced through preaching of the gospel. Revivalism functioned as a standard of religious practice against which 'vital religion' was measured and sustained.

Revivalism, 1914–1939

By the early 1920s, it was evident that revivalism had undergone a process of transformation within Methodism. Although the Congregational evangelist Lionel Fletcher, under wartime conditions, had demonstrated the continued relevance of the revival, the lack of a post-war national revival of religion, and increased uncertainty over the role and place of the revival, saw revivalist practices marginalised within Methodism. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Methodist Local Preachers' and Laymen's Association and the Intercessory Prayer Union highlighted the significant continued interest of lay leaders in revival.

During the inter-war period, Methodist revivalism lost the momentum it experienced up until the First World War. During the period 1914 to 1939, conversions reported at revival meetings averaged 113 per year, while for the period 1866 to 1901, it was 543. In particular, during the decade of the 1930s, conversions averaged only 52 per year.[1] To what extent did liberalism and modernism affect the practice of revivalism?

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[1] See statistical analysis in thesis Chapter 9.

The roots of liberalism and modernism within South Australian Methodism are apparent from at least the 1870s. One only has to scan the Methodist periodicals in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century to identify the concerns of readers. In the main, these included rationalism, the historicity of Genesis, dogmatism in theology and science, evolution, 'new theology', 'higher criticism', secularism, and socialism.[1] From about 1874, the task of responding to the intellectual challenges, in what has been termed 'The Victorian Crisis of Faith', [2] developed a sense of urgency within South Australian Methodism, which continued well into the twentieth-century. In January 1874, the *South Australian Primitive Methodist Record* opened its lead article "The Bible and Rationalism" with the statement: "The battle about The Book [Bible] has not yet ceased".[3] The article's basic premise was that the Bible was under attack because there was

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[1] See for example, *South Australian Primitive Methodist Record*, January 1874, pp. 65-71; *South Australian Bible Christian Magazine*, February 1878, pp. 374-376, *Methodist Journal*, 15 March 1878, p. 4; *Christian Weekly & Methodist Journal*, 9 May 1884, p. 6; 21 November 1884, p. 3; 27 November 1885, pp.2–3; 4 December 1885, pp. 2–3; 11 December 1885, pp. 2, 4; 3 June 1892, p. 2; 10 June 1892, p. 2; 17 June 1892, p. 2; 15 July 1892, p. 4; 29 July 1892, pp. 6–7; 17 February 1893, p. 4; 24 February 1893, p. 7; 3 March 1893, p. 5; 25 August 1893, p. 6; 29 September 1893, p. 6; 5 April 1895, p. 6; *South Australian Primitive Methodist Magazine*, April 1886, pp. 242–247; *South Australian Primitive Methodist*, January 1897, pp. 109–113. See also, Walter Phillips, "The Defence of Christian Belief in Australia 1875-1914: The Responses to Evolution and Higher Criticism", *Journal of Religious History* 9, no. 4, 1977, pp. 402–423.

[2] Symondson, Anthony, ed., *The Victorian Crisis of Faith*, SPCK, London, 1970.

[3] *South Australian Primitive Methodist Record*, January 1874, pp. 65–71.

difficulty in reconciling science with theology, reason with revelation. Methodists and other believers worried over the place of Christian belief in Australian society.

In the late nineteenth-century, new intellectual thinking, posed particularly by Darwinian evolutionary theory, higher criticism, and Christian socialism, challenged the once dominant conversionist-revivalist ethos of South Australian Methodism. These challenges affected how some within the Methodist churches understood revivalism and its practice. The various issues highlighted a fundamental question—should Methodism abandon its revivalist heritage altogether with its emphasis on personal conversion and growth in holiness? The emergence of a liberalised Methodism typified by Hugh Gilmore and John Day Thompson, ministers at Wellington Square Primitive Methodist Church North Adelaide from 1889 to 1892 and 1892 to 1898 respectively, challenged the revivalist heritage. Gilmore and Thompson reflected openness to new thought and a willingness to experiment with the implications of embracing elements of the intellectual challenges posed. The two social gospellers at Wellington Square, together with the socially-minded evangelicals at the Pirie Street Wesleyan Church, the two 'cathedrals', provided Methodism with both the intellectual rigour and the experience of a social welfare-evangelistic praxis. Revivalism waned in the face of these.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, debates over the merits of the 'old Orthodoxy' and newer understandings continued to foster unease and uncertainty within Methodism. Perhaps this is best illustrated when in the year Peake's *Commentary* came on sale (1919), and in

anticipation of the challenges to come, the title of the Methodist weekly periodical *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, dropped the secondary descriptor "The Champion of Evangelical Christianity" in favour of the more neutral term, "The Organ of the Methodist Church in South Australia".[1] For some Methodist preachers, modernism undermined the platform of certainty and assurance needed to preach with conviction—something they once took for granted. In particular, short-term revivalist preaching depended on the established credibility of both the message and the messenger considered essential for effective preaching.[2] On the other hand, the liberals argued that as human understanding of divine truth evolves, then religious certainty does not exist; it is progressive.[3] Furthermore, liberalism and modernism also indirectly affected the practice of revivalism through what some Methodists believed was an elimination of the miraculous and the supernatural from religion.[4] A distinctly liberal stress on human

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[1] The complete title of the paper was *Australian Christian Commonwealth: The Organ of the Methodist Church in South Australia and the Champion of Evangelical Christianity*. This title first appeared on 4th January 1901, after South Australian Methodist Union came into effect on 31 December 1900. The new title first appeared in January 1919 with the additional words, "The Challenge Of The New Era", placed above the title.

[2] See for example, letter by Rev. J.H. Watts to the editor *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 20 May 1932, p. 3.

[3] David Hilliard, 'Strong's Liberal Contemporaries: Adelaide, 1870-1914', paper presented at the Charles Strong Symposium, Australian Association for the Study of Religion Conference, Adelaide, 7 July 2006, 5.

[4] See for example letter by Rev. J. H. Watts to editor *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, 6 May 1932, p. 5; Articles by the Rev. H. T. Rush,

accommodation and social action, accompanied by a lessened need for a dramatic intervention of the supernatural in conversion, weakened Methodist revivalism in the 1930s.

Historically, South Australian Methodism championed evangelical Christianity through its highly visible practice of revivalism. Revivalism's relatively widespread practice and comparative success within Methodism was unique among the churches from early colonial days until the First World War. By the 1920s, however, this distinction and claim fell out of favour in the context of a liberalised evangelicalism and modernist understandings of the Bible.

After the war revivalists and missioners included Smith Wigglesworth (1922), Aimee Semple McPherson (1922), J.M. Hickson—healing (1923) and Norman Dunning (1928, 1935). Not all were Methodists and not all were invited by Methodist representatives, but in most cases were supported by Methodists. In the 1930s, Methodism embraced the Oxford Group Movement in an effort to revalidate its credentials as a 'vital religion', and in doing so highlighted some of the challenges of a liberalised evangelicalism on traditional Methodism. Methodism attempted to maintain and revive its evangelical credentials as it continued to proclaim a gospel of a full and free salvation and continued to look for a national revival of religion, which would transform society.

By the Second World War, revivalism, once undergirded by the certainties of the 'old Orthodoxy', was no longer

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Australian Christian Commonwealth, 4 June 1926, p. 9; 26 November 1926, p. 12.

widely accepted within Methodism. Liberalism and modernism challenged the understanding that revivalism was still the instrument of choice for both conversion and growth in holiness, and precipitated, for some Methodist clergy, a crisis of confidence and assurance in the role of evangelistic preaching.

Conclusion

From 1838 to 1939, revivalism was the main reason why Methodism became the largest non-Anglican Protestant religion in South Australia by 1900. Revivalism provided the Methodist churches with an effective methodology for conversionary growth in the quest for 'vital religion'—a religion of the heart. Revivalism produced the conversions necessary for Methodism to expand its membership and encompass 25 per cent of the state's self-described Methodist population by 1900.

Within an international evangelical worldview, South Australian Methodism in its first one-hundred years fell broadly in line with the experience of eighteenth-century British and American evangelicals, for whom revivals were an integral part of historical interpretation.[1] South Australian Wesleyans in particular were a revival denomination. As such, Methodist 'vital religion' looked constantly for a 'torrent of grace', for the spread and revival of heart religion. In many respects, revivalism looked like an incoming wave always claiming to be

[1] Schmidt, Darren, 'The Pattern of Revival: John Wesley's Vision of "Iniquity" and "Godliness" in Church History', in Cooper, Kate and Gregory, Jeremy, eds., *Revivals and Resurgence in Christian History*, Studies in Church History 44, (Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2008), p. 152.

just about to break on the shoreline. What it experienced was more in line with the progressive nature of kingdom extension in which the localised revival, from town to town, co-existed as counterpoint to the daily demands of institutional evangelical religion. Hence, the revival, with its power to convert, provided Methodism with significant periods of membership and self-described growth.

Further Conclusions and Relevance of Revivalism

The following additional conclusions are drawn from my thesis. Although this paper does not present all the evidence and analysis for them, they are offered in the knowledge that the reader is the best judge as to their continuing relevance for today.

First, the experience of conversion, also known as 'decisions for Christ' from the 1890s, was the core component of most religious revivals. However true this was for the nineteenth century, by the beginning of the twentieth, there were signs of a less than exclusive focus on the conversion or 'new birth' experience to define the initiatory rite of the vital religionist. After the First World War, challenges to the revivalist-conversionary ethos saw membership grow more by means other than conversion. This meant that Methodism received into its membership some for whom the personal experience of conversion was more a matter of arbitration than accommodation, and thereby weakened the very basis of Methodist 'vital religion'.

Second, Methodist revivalism allied with an effective and intentional church planting strategy was well suited

to the demands of a frontier, rural and expanding colony. It was contextually relevant to its host culture. The local revival was a most effective way of making 'vital religion' come alive for the colonists.

Third, revivalism tended to promote the certainty of conversion within a borderless evangelicalism. It promoted an evangelical sub-culture across denominations.

Fourth, Methodist revivalism was conversion focused and not issues focussed. Conversion was the gateway to 'vital religion', a religion of the heart, which possessed a motivating power. Revivalism produced converts empowered to appropriate evangelical causes, such as the moral reforms of temperance and Sabbath observance.

Fifth, during the inter-war period, the inability of the Protestant churches to advance the 'Christianisation' of the nation beyond the pre-First World War agenda facilitated within Methodism an increased emphasis on the inward-looking features of revivalism. The democratisation of revivalism, evident before the First World War, led to the formation of lay revivalist agencies after the war. In the 1920s, lay leadership contributed to the emergence of Pentecostalism, healing, and the Oxford Group Movement. Emphases, which included holiness and 'the higher Christian life', fostered the internalisation of Christian experience and the relegation of external evangelistic energies to internal venture.

Sixth, the growth of these voluntary evangelistic agencies and movements in the early twentieth-century, within or outside of Methodism, but allied to it, highlighted a perennial tension present within 'vital religion' since the Evangelical Revival—that of divided loyalty.

For the individual, the issue was how to maintain loyalty to the Methodist Church and to other evangelical polarities, particularly if they were outside of Methodism, such as the Evangelisation Society of South Australia and emerging Pentecostalism in the 1920s, and the Oxford Group Movement in the 1930s. The Movement reflected cultural modernism with its informality and lack of structure. Combined with an emphasis of divine guidance, expressionism, spontaneity, and appeal to young people, the Movement assisted in laying the groundwork for charismatic renewal in the 1960s and 70s. Hence, for the Methodist Church, how to maintain its leadership within the spirit and practice of the Evangelical Revival in each generation, surrounded by theological, cultural, social and economic change, was a test of its revivalist heritage. It represented the enduring problem that Max Weber depicted in 1922 as "the routinisation of charisma".[1]

Seventh, revivalism, an important contributor to Methodist denominational growth since foundation, faltered during the inter-war period. As there were fewer revivals, there were fewer conversions. There was a loss of confidence in the international evangelist to deliver numerical gains and an increased disconnect between local evangelistic events and those outside the church. There was growing uncertainty within Methodism, particularly the Conference, as to the place, nature, and purpose of revivals. Methodism attempted to reposition itself as it moved away from conservative evangelicalism

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[1] Weber, Max, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, trans. by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, 1947, Free Press of Glencoe and Collier-Macmillan, London, 1947, pp. 358–392.

to accommodate a more liberalised outlook, and, in the process, fostered the emergence of minority-status Pentecostalism. Increased democratisation of the laity through revivalist activity, the Local Preachers' and Laymen's Association, Intercessory Prayer Union, and support for and participation in the non-denominational evangelical and revivalist Evangelisation Society of South Australia, promoted the growth of lay creativity often unencumbered by the strictures of denominationalism.

Fledgling Pentecostalism relied on the innovative creativity of its constituency to experiment with tongues speaking, healings, and other works of the Holy Spirit as it sought self-definition and identity. Understood as either schism within evangelicalism, or the preservation of individual belief and integrity, Pentecostalism provided some Methodists with innovative opportunity to maintain their 'activism', apprehended as one element of David Bebbington's quadrilateral definition.[1]

Methodism invariably adapted itself to changes in society and although revivalism continued up until the Second World War, it no longer enjoyed the widespread support of its membership. The intellectual challenges of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a crisis of confidence in the use of revivalist methods and practices. No longer was traditional revivalism the method of choice to initiate conversion. Hence, Methodists experimented in the 1920s and 1930s with other forms of revivalist activity.

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[1] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3.

Eighth, there was no general revival, rather an undercurrent of buoyant optimism that maintained a desire for, and expectancy of, further revivals. This was the only constant factor among the complex influences and variables involved. With or without economic depression, revivals occurred; without the expectancy of individuals, churches, and the Conference, they would not have happened.

Ninth, temperance and Sabbatarianism can be understood as internal challenges to the priority of revivalist conversion. Although revivalism produced conversions, which were the gateway to 'vital religion', the ongoing test of religious vitality was the standard of holiness evident in the life of the claimant. These standards included among others, temperance and Sabbath observance. These two characteristics were present in seed form within Methodism during the early years of the colony, and established that Methodism's interest in social questions began from that time.

However, the conversion-holiness nexus, as the overarching goal of Methodism, never eventuated as a seamless process in which the latter depended on the fulfilment of the former, and together, existed in an inter-dependent mutually inclusive relationship. By the First World War, Methodism's moral practices and social reform agenda came to define its brand of holiness. In particular, temperance and transgressions of the Sabbath came to define increasingly what Methodism stood against, rather than what it stood for. Many in society, in the aftermath of the First World War, preferred the pursuit of increased personal freedoms, Sunday picnics, use of the motor car, leisure and organised sport in the face

of a perceived relatively inflexible and restrictive Methodist lifestyle. Revivalist meetings lost their appeal to other more attractive pursuits.

Methodist temperance reformers were utterly convinced that intemperance was a destructive force in society, and therefore warranted concerted reform action. Within the evangelical community, it was widely believed that intemperance was the cause of poverty. Methodists were increasingly persuaded to adopt temperance principles, which came to mean teetotalism by the 1880s. The introduction of six o'clock hotel closing in the First World War was the high-water mark for temperance reform.

Sabbatarianism was another measure which attracted the attention of Methodist reformers. The majority of chapel and churchgoers believed it was important to honour the Sabbath and to avoid God's judgement on the nation in the event of widespread Sabbath desecration. Wesleyans in particular, and Methodists in general after 1900, were strict and thorough in their denunciation of Sabbath indiscretions, and as for temperance, utilised one or more of the mid-Victorian four arenas of advocacy, in pulpit, press, platform, and parliament.[1]

Invariably, the traditional policy of denunciation, whilst it possessed limited appeal to many Methodists, failed to arrest the indifference of wider society. In the 1820s, the Scottish evangelical, Thomas Chalmers, had eulogised in a sermon entitled, "The Expulsive Power of a New

[1] Larsen, Timothy, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England*, Paternoster Press, Bletchley, Milton Keyes, 1999, p. 31.

Affection", the merit of appealing to the greater and positive attributes of the gospel, rather than worldly affections, and that the force of moral denunciation alone would not displace misplaced affections. They were overcome by the "affection of the Gospel".[1]

The point here, when applied to moral reform, is that (it can be argued), by the 1920s, attempts to create better citizens through proclaiming injunctions of iniquity avoidance and moral self-denial, had failed to arrest the public conscience from an increased commitment to individual moral autonomy and democratic individualism. The moral reform tradition, which, in part, helped to define Methodist holiness, became identified with the pronouncements of a middle-class respectable church intent on imposing their restrictive proprieties, typified by total abstinence and Sabbatarianism, on wider society.

Overall, Methodist revivalism established itself in South Australia soon after colonial settlement began in 1836. Within the broad bounds of the separation of church and state, and the voluntary principle, revivalism enabled Methodism to differentiate itself from what it considered were nominal expressions of Christian identity. However, once the notion of popular indifference to organised religion gained momentum in the early twentieth century, revivalism faltered as a marker of differentiation within a common Christianity and relatively homogeneous evangelical piety.

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[1] Chalmers, Thomas, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*, Thomas Constable, Edinburgh, 1855.

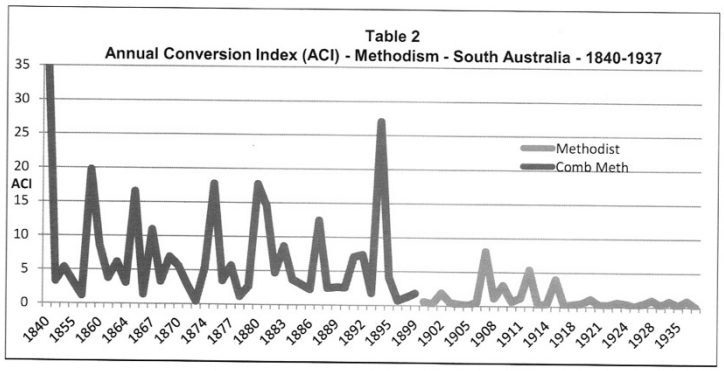
This paper contends that in South Australian Methodism from 1838 to 1939, the quest for 'vital religion' began following a 'religion of the heart' experience of conversion, engendered primarily by revivalist means. After conversion, the pursuit of holiness came to be associated with such practices as temperance and Sunday observance. The study has also shown that revivalism was far more extensive than previously thought, and provided Methodism with the converting power necessary to achieve significant membership and self-described growth within South Australia. It was an effective methodology in the quest for 'vital religion'. Once revivalism faltered, as it did in the inter-war period, the number of converts declined accordingly, and the supply line became restricted in the absence of other conversionary methods. Conversion was the gateway to 'vital religion'. One could be a Methodist without conversion, but one could not be a "vital religionist" without a 'religion of the heart' conversion.

Table 1

Methodist Conversions – South Australia – Summary 1838-1939

Period	Years	Conversions	Average Number of Conversions per Year	Conversions		Conversion Events		Conversions as % of Membership Growth
				Adelaide	Country	Adelaide	Country	
1838-1865	27	3163	117	2002	1161	15	24	45.6%
1866-1901	35	17913	543	5286	16355	60	209	250.1%
1902-1913	11	3728	339					88.6%
1914-1939	25	2826	113	654	2017	9	44	45.6%
Total		27630	270	7942	19533	82	277	

Sources: Data from Thesis Appendices 2 and 3.



Annual Conversion Index (Combined) for the Bible Christian, Primitive, and Wesleyan Methodist Churches 1840-1899. (Comb Meth) Annual Conversion Index for the Methodist Church of Australasia, South Australia Conference, 1900-1937 (Methodist)

Annual Conversion Index (ACI): The number of recorded conversions per year as a percentage of the annual membership. Indicates the relative 'converting activity' in the church in any one year.

Brian Chalmers is now retired having served as parish minister, RAAF chaplain and church planter. His doctoral research through Flinders University was on Methodists and revivalism in South Australia.

ETHEL MITCHELL: A PIONEER OF THE UNITING CHURCH

Alison Head

Abstract

Ethel Mitchell was elected as the second Moderator of the Synod of Victoria UCA—the first layperson and the first woman to be elected.

After growing up in Queensland within the Presbyterian Church, Mitchell came to Victoria as a wife and then mother, and took on an a active leadership role in women's activities in the Presbyterian Church in Victoria. This involvement led to her role as a representative on the Joint Planning Committee for the Uniting Church and also the Joint Constitution Committee. She attended the inaugural Assembly in Sydney. In Victoria she was active on several fronts, including the Nominating Committee for the first Moderator. This probably led on to her nomination as the next moderator, and to her subsequent election.

Mitchell's life as moderator was very fulfilling but also had some problems which arose because as a woman and a lay person she was seen by some people as not needing things that a male minister was entitled to as moderator.

For most of us the pioneers of the Uniting Church were clergymen. We tend to forget that there were some women involved. This paper is about one woman who contributed in many ways to the life of the church both before and after union in Victoria. Ethel Mitchell was the

second Moderator of the UCA Synod of Victoria, the first woman and the first lay person. When we think of the denominations that united, the Presbyterian and Methodist had not had a woman leader, in fact there were very few women in the Assembly or the Conference. In the Congregational Church, the last chairperson of the Congregational Union of Victoria was a lay woman, Mrs Dora Plumb.

I am reminded about the first woman who came to the Methodist Conference as a proxy for a man from Tasmania, and the whole discussion revolved around the question "Could a lady be a layman?" Of course the rules for the Conference were that there were the ordained ministers and the same number of laymen. She was accepted, so I suppose a lady could be a layman. But let us return to Mrs Ethel Mitchell and hear a short version of her life story.

She was born in 1918 in Ayr, Queensland as Ethel Amy Carson. Her father was a bank manager and the son of a Presbyterian minister, so the family of Ethel and her three brothers were brought up as members of the church. She was educated at a number of schools as the family moved about, but finished up at the Brisbane Girls Grammar School and finally Queensland University where she started a science degree. This was during the Second World War. Two of her brothers were in the Air Force and were flying in Libya, and both were shot down. One was missing believed killed for three months before it became known he was a prisoner of war, first of all in Italy then for three years in Germany. It was because of all the trauma of the war that she withdrew from the university at the end of her failed third year. As

she said many of her male peers were joining the forces and she lost patience with being a student. She was recruited by one of the university professors and offered a job as a cipher clerk with the Royal Australian Navy with six or seven other girls. They were given some training and were joined by some young men who came up to Brisbane to do the same sort of job. One of these was John Mitchell who was in the navy and came to head up the office. As Ethel said they were suitably impressed with each other and became engaged and were married the day after peace was declared.

After the wedding they flew to Melbourne and eventually settled in Glen Iris, where their family of two boys and a girl were born. Their church affiliation at St Andrew's Gardiner grew when the Rev. Farquhar Gunn and his wife Jean came there, and as a strong friendship grew with the Gunns and this led to a closer connection with the congregation.

It was Jean Gunn who got Ethel interested in the Presbyterian Women's Association, which was to take her into a leadership role within the Presbyterian Church. It was in October 1952 that the Presbyterian Victorian Assembly approved of the Objects of the Association and declared it an accredited organisation of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. The main idea which had been previously passed by the General Assembly of Australia was that although there was much work done by women in the church through its various organisations there was a lack of coordination.

According to their 1953 report to Assembly the aim of the PWA was "To unite the women of the Church, and to provide for them a channel of information, expression of opinion, and action in all matters which concern them within the Church and the community".[1]

There was some opposition to this as the PWMU—the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union which had been functioning since the 1890s—was seen as the organisation which represented women in the church by some of its members.

Ethel was elected as president for the Victorian PWA in 1969. This was a three year appointment and for Ethel it was rather a hard job as she learnt it as she went along.

In the report in *Australian Presbyterian Life* it says she was a former vice-president. An interesting thing about the report is that all the women on the executive were listed under their husband's name or initials—for example, Mrs L.J. Mitchell. The next year when all the presidents for the states were listed there was a change to their own names—for example, Mrs Ethel Mitchell. It was a time when Women's Liberation was active, including within the church. Included in the report was the mention that they would all meet in Sydney in September for a Federal Conference.

On a local level Ethel decided the way to get the message across to the local women was to organise rallies where the presidents of the other organisations, the PWMU, the PMU (the Presbyterian Mothers Union), and

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[1] *Proceedings of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria*, October 1953, p. 82.

the Home Mission Workers' Association would all be invited as well, to talk about their group. At one meeting Ethel was handed a note which was a warning that someone from the PWMU had spoken a week before and encouraged them all not to have anything to do with 'this lot'.

She often said that the three years as president of the PWA were the most difficult of her life.

In the early 1970s her involvement in other committees of the Presbyterian Church grew as well. *The Proceedings of the Victorian General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church* for 1973 lists her as a member of the Committee for Deaconess Training, the Victorian Council of Churches, the Christian Unity Committee, the Board of Local Mission, the *Church and Nation* Committee and the Board of Ecumenical Mission. It must have been a busy time. As can be seen she was very interested in ecumenical affairs and made friends of many of the people from other churches.

As church union was being discussed and voted on, it was not surprising when the Joint Planning Committee was set up in Victoria in November 1974, with each of the three uniting churches appointing nine representatives, that Mrs Ethel Mitchell was one of the Presbyterians appointed. Of the 27 members appointed 13 were ordained ministers, seven were lay women and seven lay men. The office bearers were all clergymen and when an executive was formed a little later it was these three plus a lay person from each denomination. The Presbyterian nomination was Ethel Mitchell. She was appointed as Convenor of a communications task group, because she had argued for better

communication of the activities of the committee to those outside. The task group published a couple of leaflets *Three-in–One* and *Speak Up* which were circulated to all the churches.

In 1975 Ethel Mitchell became vice-chairman for Victoria of the Joint Planning Committee. It was probably in this capacity that she chaired the nomination panel for the first moderator. The Rev. Ron Allardice was the one chosen, he had been chairman of the JPC, the Rev. Graham McAnalley who had been the secretary, became the Secretary of the Synod.

She also attended the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting church in Australia in Sydney, both the celebration in the Sydney Town Hall, and then the actual Assembly in the Lyceum Theatre.

At the first Victorian Synod she was nominated for the next Moderator. Graham McAnalley told her that two Presbyteries had nominated her and asked her would she stand. After discussion with her husband John who argued that if she did not allow her name to go forward she would disenfranchise those two Presbyteries, she agreed to stand. There were eight nominations, the other seven being ordained clergymen. After three votes Ethel was elected as the second Moderator. It was not something she was expecting and she was rather lost for words, not something that happened often. According to the report in *Church and Nation* she received a standing ovation when her election was announced.

She also realised that it was a radical and courageous sign for a new church so early in its existence. Another thought was that the election of a lay woman saved the

uniting churches from having to choose between the ordained ministers from Presbyterian, Methodist or Congregational backgrounds, so soon after union.

The year as Moderator-elect was seen by Ethel as marvellous preparation as it gave her lots of opportunities to practise speaking to congregations. She became involved in many duties and committees including chairman of the Division of Ecumenical mission as the new church was working out its practice and understanding, for example, of the role of the Moderator.

She was installed as Moderator at the opening of the Second Synod of the UCA in Victoria on 1 October 1978. In her address she questioned the effectiveness of all the committees of the church, as had many others. She also recalled how Jesus had chosen ordinary people and encouraged people to respond to his call in the world today. It would be the life, attitudes and priorities of congregations which would influence how the church fulfils its mission to the world. Congregations should involve themselves in concern for the unemployed, the Aborigines, and the victims of third world poverty. A change Ethel made during the Synod, which attracted a bit of criticism, was to add quite a lot of lay people to the list of memorial minutes of ministers who had died during the year.

One of the problems as a woman was what to wear as moderator. She refused to wear a cream academic gown as was suggested by someone, as she was proud to be a lay person. The moderator's stole as worn by the Rev. Ron Allardice was too long to be worn with a normal length dress, and so could not be passed on, so a shorter one was made. An interesting side light to this is that

both the stoles were made by the Carmelite sisters at their convent in Kew. Later Ethel received a card from them offering her their prayers and best wishes for her work.

Another problem which caused a lot more concern and work was that she as Moderator was not given any secretarial support. Ron Allardice had had a secretary and staff to support him. Ethel did all her correspondence by hand which was a long and tedious process, which meant she was at the office for a long time, and this lead on to another problem, that of a car space at the office. Assuming that the moderator's car space would be hers, it was suggested that as she lived fairly close by and would not be in the office all that much she would not need the car space. However she did work at the office on most days and needed her car for meetings outside the Synod building. Her husband John took up the problem with some of the office hierarchy and after a couple of problem days the matter was sorted. Ethel did feel that these problems occurred because she was a woman.

The major problem of being a lay Moderator was the preaching that was expected. She found this difficult and she worked very hard in preparing for the services she spoke at. In fact I think she had always been one who was very good at preparation for all the things she undertook. In this case as in many things she relied on her husband John, who read and commented on what she had prepared.

One of the highlights of the year for Ethel was the general tolerance of people who accepted her and helped her. She was helped by the number of people who went

out of their way to write or tell her that she had their support. She was also happy to see the enthusiasm for union and the passion to see this new church work.

Near the end of her term as moderator in an interview with *Church and Nation*, some statistics were given—she had spoken to 60 congregations, opened and dedicated five old people's homes, two child care centres, one manse and one church. Her interest in clergy/lay relations was mentioned, with the reference made to the tremendous fund of talent in the Uniting Church. In every parish there are gifted people who are using their gifts to make the job of the ministers easier so that they can do the things they are trained for.[1]

When her year as Moderator finished she seemed to be working just as hard. The list of committees she worked on was very lengthy and she accepted the appointment as the co-ordinator of World Mission's Program of Education in race relations in Australia from the beginning of 1980. Plans were for her to work with the Rev Dick Wootton setting up a consultative group in each Synod, and also to work ecumenically where possible, as well as with community groups. Some of the committees she continued to work on were the Synod Standing Committee and Property Board, the Epworth Health Care Board, Ormond College Council and the Presbytery of Yarra Valley. She continued her work for many years and in 1999 was awarded an OAM for her services to the Uniting Church and the community.

On 27 April 2013 Ethel Mitchell died.

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[1] *Church and Nation*, 26 September 1979, pp. 8, 9.

I would like to finish by quoting two things from the papers of the Victorian Synod. The first one is the record of appreciation when Ethel finished as Moderator.

"That the Synod records its sincere thanks to Mrs Ethel Mitchell for the sincerity, thoroughness, and inspiration of her leadership as Moderator of Synod".[1]

The second is from her obituary prepared by the Yarra Yarra Presbytery.

> Ethel is remembered as bringing to her Moderatorship and leadership in the still-developing Uniting Church, a new dimension of life. It has been said of her that the church did not know what it was getting itself into but Ethel in turn had a sense of moving with this new movement on a journey into the unknown.
>
> Ethel broke open the stereotype of the role of women in the life of the Church. With her strong, direct, gracious and considered presence, she facilitated a radically new face for the Uniting Church and mainstream Protestantism in Victoria.
>
> … Ethel always remained open to the new and is strongly remembered in bringing to the newly-established Uniting Church in Australia, especially in the state of Victoria, a strong awareness that leadership within the church is the work of ALL the people of God.

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[1] *Minutes of the Victorian Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia*, 1979, p. iii

> For women and men, Ethel is a valued role model, especially for those called to leadership, in its many expressions, within the life of the Uniting Church and beyond.[1]

Ethel Mitchell is remembered as a much loved leader and pioneer of the Uniting Church in Australia in Victoria.

Alison Head, BA(Hons), MA, wrote her MA thesis on the Wesleyan Methodists in Port Phillip. She has been involved in the UCA Historical Society Synod of Victoria and Tasmania since it began soon after union, and she is also a volunteer at the Synod Archives from about the same time.

[1] *Minutes of the Victoria and Tasmania Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia*, 2013, Memorial minutes.

EXTINCT VOLCANOES: THE ROLE OF MISSIONARIES IN SHAPING THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Margaret Reeson

Abstract

The years of the 1970s, when debates about church union were happening in Australia, coincided with a time of dramatic change in parts of the world where Australian missionaries were working. Nations in the Pacific, Asia and Africa were becoming independent. Overseas workers were no longer as welcome or needed as previously, as churches and governments 'localised' their staff. By the time the Uniting Church was inaugurated in 1977, many experienced former missionaries were returning to Australia and finding their place in this new church.

Some church folk dismissed returned missionaries as 'extinct volcanoes', whose best years of ministry were behind them. Perhaps to their critics' surprise, many returned mission staff, both lay and clergy, have in fact brought significant influence to the shaping of the Uniting Church.

This paper explores the formation of this cohort in All Saints College, Haberfield in Sydney prior to their missionary service, a formation experience shared by Presbyterian, London Missionary Society and Methodist fellow-students during the 1960s and early 70s. It considers not only the challenges faced by this group, as they re-entered church life in an Australia which had changed in their absence, but also the value of what

they brought into the new organism of the UCA, based on their cross-cultural experience with partner churches. The group included those who have served in the roles of UCA President, Moderator, and as Presbytery and congregational leaders.

In an old recipe book of collected offerings from a group of South Australian church women in the 1960s I found this recipe under Miscellaneous.

> Preserved missionary
>
> Take one missionary, preferably young and lean, soak many times in water (salty, not holy). Dry out until parched in the sun. Prick, shake and resoak. Spice with humour, season with wisdom, oil with compassion then fire with enthusiasm. The result can be used in many ways. Suitable for special occasions with extra dressing.

When you hear the word 'missionary' what image does this bring to mind? It has become an awkward term, sometimes suggesting outdated colonial attitudes to the 'heathen', or inappropriate and insensitive zeal, or misguided people trying to force Western ideas on people who are really not interested. Even those who have gone to serve a community somewhere overseas over the years have often used other words: fraternal worker, mission co-worker, or have said "I am not a missionary. I am a nurse, or teacher, or mechanic, or university lecturer who has gone to work for the church in another country". Recently I heard someone described as a "cross cultural witness".

This paper explores the part played in Uniting Church by those who have returned to one of our Synods after serving in another culture, often with one of our partner churches. If you are uncomfortable with the term 'missionary', choose another expression. The timing of the beginning of Uniting Church in Australia in the 1970s coincided with a period when many people with cross-cultural experience were returning to Australia. Were they, as some suggested, 'extinct volcanoes', a spent force, when they arrived back in an Australian context, or was something else going on? This paper draws on more than fifty five years of experience and observation rather than secondary sources. My friends and I are the primary sources.

What formed this group prior to overseas service?

For many years Australians had been leaving Australia to serve as mission staff in the Pacific, the Indian sub-continent, Korea, Indonesia, in other parts of Asia and Africa and with indigenous communities in Australia. The earliest of our spiritual ancestors left Sydney for New Zealand in 1821 and a second couple went from Sydney to Tonga in 1822. That is almost two hundred years of mission connection. All three of our founding denominations had active missionary societies with many mission staff governed by mission boards and supported by strong societies of Australian women who raised funds and gave pastoral and practical support to workers in the field. For example, by 1950 the network of Methodist Overseas Missions work in the Pacific region was quite complex. The same was true for the other denominations. It was understood that this activity was

a natural and essential part of the life of any Christian denomination.

Years before the UCA was inaugurated, a precursor to church union was established. A training college for prospective mission staff from Presbyterian, Methodist and London Missionary Society was opened in 1960 in the suburb of Haberfield in Sydney. It was called All Saints College. (Previously a Methodist missionary training college had been on that site.) The Principal was the Rev Frank Whyte who had been a missionary in India. Frank Whyte introduced his students to the latest thinking about missiology, before most people had ever heard that word, particularly through the early writing of the Rev. Lesslie Newbigen. Newbigen had been a great influence on him during his own years in India. Frank Whyte invited significant thinkers, theologians, ecumenists and historians to lecture, and taught anthropology as well as biblical studies. The students who lived together at All Saints College had a very particular education in trying to understand other cultures as well as forming strong friendships with people from the other denominations. Each student learned not only about the place to which they were to go, but also had some knowledge and interest in the places where their fellow 'saints' were going. Daily evening prayers together included prayer for those already working across the spread of the three denominations.

What were key elements of their experience overseas?

At the end of their period of training, each cohort scattered but many kept in touch with each other.

Presbyterians went to work in Central Australia, Korea or Vanuatu. London Missionary Society people went to Cook Islands, Samoa or Papua. Methodists went to North Australia, Indonesia, India, Tonga, Fiji or different areas of Papua New Guinea.

What did they find?

Their new context was nothing like home**.** The language was different, the people looked different, the world view was very different. Even with the best preparation, this was a confronting, disturbing and destabilising experience as new workers met an unfamiliar culture. Culture shock is not being shocked by things that are uncomfortable or alarming, but a whole psychological turning upside down. Where do you fit in this strange new world? Many became angry, or critical or upset by the differences.

They had to learn to work with a new, often small, community of fellow workers with no escape from each other. This could be either the best experience of Christian community of their life, or the most challenging. Not everyone had a good experience. Some spouses were very unhappy.

For some, the fresh understandings of culture and the gospel of the early 1960s came into conflict with earlier paternalistic attitudes of senior workers.

They met and worked closely with co-workers from many backgrounds. This was richly rewarding and laid foundations for strong lifelong friendships.

In some cases, they discovered that they were out of step with many other Australians or Anglos who may

have been working in the same part of the world with a colonial government, in business, education or as anthropologists. Those working with a mission or church were often seen as a bit odd. Their close working relationships and Christian fellowship was with the local people of the place.

They had opportunities to be involved in creative, exciting new projects and to work ecumenically on national projects such as Christian Education. For example, in 1965 a large workshop was held in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, where Methodist, Baptist, Anglican and Lutheran workers (both local people and expatriates) worked together on a common Christian Education curriculum for use in government schools.

In PNG and the Solomon Islands, workers witnessed the beginning of a new United Church in 1968, nine years before the UCA began, with the union of Methodist Overseas Missions, Papua Ekelesia, formerly London Missionary Society and a Presbyterian group based in Port Moresby. Church Union could work well, they discovered. In India, the Church of North India and the Church of South India had been united for many years.

They often had to reassess what they understood by 'rich' or 'poor'. Although they were usually earning less than they might have done in Australia, they were often embarrassingly wealthy compared to their local neighbours.

They were in some ways isolated from changes to culture in Australia, with the increasing secularisation of society. When they saw the *Time* magazine cover of April 1966 asking 'Is God Dead?' it seemed a strange

question. In their contexts in the 'two thirds world' a strong understanding of the spiritual and Christian faith was significant to many communities**.** They witnessed many signs of the living God in action, including a period of religious revival in the Pacific regions in the 1970s with elements of classic revivals from other parts of the world.

What factors influenced their return to Australia?

During the 1970s, debates about church union in Australia were very intense and congregations were voting to unite, or not. This period coincided with the years when many Australian mission staff working overseas in Asia and the Pacific returned home. By 1977, many people with cross-cultural experience were finding their place in the new Uniting Church.

Why had so many returned in that period? For some it was health, or the age of their children who were ready for high school. A broader reason was that this was the era across the world when many regions that had been under former colonial rule were now becoming independent nations. In Africa, for example, many nations became independent during the 1960s. In the Pacific, Fiji gained independence in 1970, Papua New Guinea in 1976 and Vanuatu in 1980. With independence, local people wanted to take responsibility and leadership, in government and also in the churches. Australians who had worked for the government in places like Papua New Guinea were being urged to train their local successors, and then leave.

At the same time, more and more loudly we heard the cry of "Missionary, go home!" Indigenous leaders were taking responsibility in many places. Australian and other overseas staff working with churches were beginning to feel surplus to requirements. For decades, academics had been almost entirely critical of any missionary presence and only recently have been offering more balanced assessments, acknowledging fine work in anthropology, education or health. So those who were still working with an overseas church were being forced to feel that they were taking the place that rightfully belonged to a local person, or a sense of guilt that their presence in another culture was inappropriate or even damaging. Had it been a mistake to go there in the first place, as some were suggesting?

By the late 1970s the big teams of Australians working with overseas churches had been reduced considerably and by the '80s had dwindled to a handful. The earlier pattern of long-term mission service (3–20 years' service) changed to periodic consultancies, brief exposure visits and short terms of several months bringing specific skills to a task, such as theological education. All Saints College closed.

The large cohort of people who had experienced life in a cross-cultural community now appeared as ministers and lay people in the congregations of the new Uniting Church in Australia.

What were the challenges of transition back to Australian church life?

It was not always an easy transition. Some, perhaps all, found it hard to return from what had been a profound,

life-shaping period in a different context. They had lost a role and a work that they valued. They had lost an international community of friends. Skills and languages they had learned in Asia or the Pacific had no place in suburban or rural Australia. Many returned mission staff experienced what they called 'reverse culture shock'. Now they were looking at their own society with different eyes and seeing it more objectively and often critically. So much had changed in their absence, and they were not the same people who had once set off for a great adventure in a different world. Where did they fit now? They could be angry and frustrated by the materialism and commercialisation that they witnessed and upset by what seemed to be selfishness in a wealthy country.

They came back to a different church. Many had not taken an active part in the debates regarding a potential Uniting Church. So those who had served in a different context for some years came home to significant change. Ministers who had left Australia as Methodist or Presbyterian or Congregational on return needed to affirm that they wanted to be part of UCA. In some cases there was some awkwardness in finding suitable places for these supposedly extinct volcanoes to serve. Former Presbyterians were grieved to find that some close friends and family no longer belonged to the same denomination. Familiar and cherished forms and systems were no longer in place. New, unfamiliar figures were now in leadership and as colleagues. Some ministers feared that ministry in Australia would seem very dull in comparison to the high challenges of overseas and cross-cultural work. Their questions and challenges to

'the way we do things here' could make comfortable congregations uneasy.

For lay people returning from overseas service, there was the added problem of finding a house and work. Some experienced teachers and health workers found that their qualifications were out of date and they had to return to study. Some who had once had responsibility for large projects now struggled to find employment. After years on small stipends, families were financially behind their peers at home. Children who had known only the world of a Pacific community or an Asian university found an Australian school playground an alienating place. Unlike a returned minister, who would be placed in a congregation, lay people needed to find a congregation where they could belong. Both clergy and lay people often found themselves irritated by what seemed trivial rather than life and death issues in their local church.

Returning mission staff were given very mixed messages by both church communities and the wider community. They knew that they were mocked or criticised by the academic world, and thought to be a bit weird by the average citizen. Those who had been influenced by such books as Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bibl*e or Michener's *Hawai'i* were sure that all missionaries are either fools, hypocrites or plain evil. On the other hand, they were lionised by some elements of church membership as being exceptionally righteous or courageous, which was just embarrassing.

To their disappointment, many returning people found that hardly anyone was interested in the experiences that had been so important to them. After a few cursory

questions like "What was the weather like over there?" their Australian families and church communities made little connection with the other world that they had left.

Despite the challenges of re-entry back into Australian church and community life, many people who had worked in cross-cultural settings now became part of the texture of the Uniting Church in Australia, joining congregations as committed, able followers of Jesus in their twenties, thirties and forties.

What has this cohort brought to Uniting Church since 1977?

At first there may have been some hesitation about how well this group of people would fit in and whether their past experience would make them unsuitable or out of touch for serious responsibility in Uniting Church. Were their best years behind them? As they scattered across Australia and settled to the next chapter of their lives, it became clear that they brought some important experience with them.

They were at ease in relating to those of another culture and language, so able to relate well in a multicultural church.

Many had experience of a United Church, such as the United Church of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, the Church of South India and the Church of North India.

They had strong personal friendships with those from the other founding denominations of Uniting Church, from their time at All Saints College.

They had a wide view of the world beyond the local and parochial, with key friendships with people from around the world, including leaders in the partner churches of UCA.

They were familiar with working in cross-cultural teams, and understanding some of the challenges and possible misunderstandings of doing that.

Women with experience of working in partner churches may have missed the western wave of feminism of the '60s and '70s. But the same women had often been given far more opportunities for leadership than would have been possible at that time in Australia. They assumed that they were capable and brought their gifts into UCA.

They were experienced in tackling difficult situations with strong-minded colleagues and were well aware that working in a so-called Christian context did not always mean a working life of harmony without stress.

They had often worked in collaboration with people of other denominations on shared projects and some had formed real friendships with Catholic priests and nuns before Vatican II had taken effect elsewhere.

They were familiar with contexts where other faiths are strongly represented.

They had seen God at work in transforming individuals and communities and believed that nothing is impossible with God in Christ, even in the most unpromising context.

They had learned to lead, and to take initiatives, and to use godly imagination in challenging contexts.

They now had a key role in enthusing home congregations to support partner churches overseas. Some returned for further short-term engagement overseas, or escorted church groups to visit partner churches to learn from them.

They often challenged the status quo in the Australian church, reminding congregations of their relative wealth and capacity to be salt and light in the world.

While former mission staff members are now ageing, some of their children who spent their early lives overseas are now in mid-life and making important contributions to the church.

Where have they turned up? Over the forty years of UCA, this cohort has been absorbed back into the body of UCA. Sometimes they have served as a valuable irritant, trying to ensure that UCA does not drift into complacency—or despair. Some add colour and flavour. Some have gone on with their local ministry quietly, as lay people or clergy, continuing a faithful work begun in other places. From that 1965 workshop in Papua New Guinea, the UCA produced two Moderators and a President. Three Presidents of the Assembly have brought cross-cultural mission experience: John Mavor, James Haire and Stuart Macmillan, D'Arcy Wood is from a missionary family with strong links to Tonga. The UCA Assembly has been blessed by the continuing gifts of this group in a range of leadership roles, people like John Brown, Malcolm Gledhill, Gordon Dicker, Graham Brookes, Bill Fischer, Rob Floyd, John and Anne Connan. In the Synod of New South Wales & ACT, five Moderators have brought this experience to their role, including the present Moderator Myung Hwa Park, Peter K. Davis, Gordon

Dicker, Tony Chi, and Margaret Reeson. Other Synods have similar stories.

Over the forty years of the life of Uniting Church there have been a great many people who could have been chosen to take on key leadership roles. It seems that from the much smaller pool of people with experience in our partner churches a disproportionate number have been called to leadership. They were not extinct volcanoes after all, but have continued to bring energy, hope and gifts of the Spirit to the life of Uniting Church.

Margaret Reeson, MA, has now retired from several national committees of UCA Assembly. She has eleven published books of Australian social and church history, with chapters in another sixteen books.

GRAPPLING WITH CHURCH UNION: REFLECTIONS ON DISCOVERING THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHURCH UNION IN TWO CONGREGATIONS OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA, NORTH ESSENDON, VICTORIA, 1977–79

Robert Renton

Abstract

In the 1970s, despite the misgivings of some individuals, enthusiasm for church union was high in many Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational congregations in Australia. Some local experiments at inter-denominational cooperation had been positive experiences, and many ministers and congregational members were keen to find ways of building a stronger church that could bring about a more effective expression of God's mission.

The rather casual attitudes of Australians towards bureaucracy and authority affected church life as much as any other aspect of life, and the cultural and political differences between such apparently similar denominations as the Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians were easily overlooked or not taken very seriously. Theological differences were even less seriously considered and the accessibility and readability of the Basis of Union convinced many that church union would be both a good thing and relatively straightforward to achieve.

Within the churches, understanding of change management was at an embryonic stage. While some were aware of the potential problems associated with attachment to buildings and to existing denominational cultures, proponents of union did not effectively tackle these. They operated on the conviction that sound theological argument and new understandings of God's mission would bring people around when change was needed. This paper tells the story of two congregations that did not understand the ramifications of change management, and as a result failed to realise what they had hoped for from union.

An exciting start

Sunday 26 June 1977 was one of considerable celebration in Essendon as the members of the five local Methodist and two Presbyterian churches gathered at 10 o'clock in St John's Essendon to form the Essendon Regional Parish.

Approximately 1,000 people filled the church and the adjacent hall and listened as a 9-year old girl read a short sermon which she had written with the assistance of her minister, the Rev. Coralie Ling. Banners represented each congregation. The contributions of the three denominations were affirmed, hymns of the three denominations were sung, and the creation of the Essendon Regional Parish was prayed for.

North Essendon's Congregations

The North Essendon congregations had been working together for some time prior to Union and had achieved

a degree of co-operation in some areas despite the dissimilarities between the congregations.

The North Essendon Methodist Church was the 'senior' church of the North Essendon Methodist Circuit and its minister was the Circuit Superintendent and, on occasions, the District Chairman. The property, situated on Mt Alexander Road, was an imposing red-brick complex of large church, two halls and parsonage. The congregation had been strong, with its membership drawn largely from the reasonably affluent middle-class areas of Essendon and Strathmore. By the 1970s the congregation had become elderly and had shrunk to about 120 members.

The North Essendon Presbyterian Church at the time was the same size as the Methodist congregation, drawn from the largely newer, less affluent areas of North Essendon, Niddrie and Airport West. The church had experienced a long ministry of 26 years from the Rev. Alfred Dickie between 1943 and 1969, during which time considerable congregational and personal upheaval had occurred. Mr and Mrs Dickie had been very active in the peace movement following the Second World War and strong advocates of social justice and he was suspected of being a 'fellow-traveller' of communism. While Mr Dickie received support from the Presbyterian Church and many of his fellow ministers, he had many detractors and there were times of considerable difficulty. More conservative members of the congregation moved to neighbouring churches—St John's and the North Essendon Methodist Church in particular—leaving the congregation composed largely of supporters.

Five years of ministry by another minister followed, and the congregation had grown with new lay leaders.

The North Essendon Presbyterian property, located on Keilor Road adjacent to the primary school, consisted of a relatively small brick church, two weatherboard halls (one occupied as a kindergarten), a new brick manse, and a set of five brick units built for disabled people during the mid 1970s.

At the time, the Rev. Bruce Prewer was the minister of the Methodist Church. I had been appointed to the Presbyterian Church as my exit appointment in 1974 and in 1975–76 I was also a part-time chaplain role at a local private school. In 1978, I changed the arrangement to being full-time chaplain and part-time minister in the regional parish. Bruce Prewer took on the pastoral responsibilities for both congregations that year.

Congregational leadership

The leadership of the two congregations was exercised by quite different groups of people. At the Methodist church the Leaders' Meeting had comprised long-standing members of the congregation who exercised responsibilities in all aspects of the church's life. They were well-respected by the congregation. Unfortunately, at the formation of the Uniting Church, the Leaders' Meeting was disbanded and only some of its members accepted nomination as elders. The new Council of Elders had some of the traditional leaders but a larger number of new leaders. The result was that the Mount Road Uniting Church's leadership group had to establish its credentials both as individuals and as a council of the church in the eyes of the congregation, as

well as come to grips with the new rules and regulations of the UCA.

However, the Presbyterian Church Session easily became the Keilor Road Uniting Church's Council of Elders. There were some new elders elected but most members had been exercising a similar role of leadership for some time. In addition, this new leadership group's role was close enough in practice to be regarded by the congregation and its members as being a continuation of the Session. The result in this case was a formal leadership group that had already established its credentials as individuals and as a leadership group in the eyes of the congregation, it had a good working relationship amongst its members, and, in fact, they carried over into the Uniting Church with them a stronger, more confident sense of leadership and authority.

There was also a new body, the Parish Council. The other leadership groups of the two congregations took different directions. The Property Committee at Mount Road now included some of the ex-Leaders' Meeting people and they were used to having to deal with a Circuit Meeting. They became a sounding board for Mount Road people's concerns, instead of the Council of Elders. At Keilor Road, however, the Property Committee felt disempowered by the existence of the Parish Council and became less important.

It also became apparent that other groups in the Mount Road congregation, notably the choir and the two ladies' groups, became more important as sounding boards for congregational leadership issues under the Uniting Church.

The consequence of these developments was that there were no objections to the Councils of Elders being amalgamated early in the piece, while the Mount Road people objected strongly to amalgamating the Property Committees.

The engagement: developments to the end of 1977

Prior to church union the two congregations had achieved a degree of co-operation particularly in the areas of ministry, Sunday School and women's groups. This co-operation had been largely the result of the then current expectations that church union would result in the combining of the congregations' resources for the greater strength of Christian witness. That the combining of congregational resources would also involve the eventual amalgamation of the congregations in one form or another seemed to be the inevitable conclusion in many people's minds and the stage was reached by 1977 where joint services of worship were being held, culminating in a special 'engagement' service, planned by both ministers with the Session and Leaders' Meeting, to celebrate the 'betrothal' of the congregations.

From the beginning in 1975 of the congregational discussions, efforts were made to begin with a theological examination of church union without starting with the assumption that congregational amalgamation was implied. Very quickly, though, it didn't stay that way. The idea of one congregation on one site for worship became the premise for all arguments and any theological or missiological reflections were to back up this position.

The second thing that became clear was that the distinctions between the denominations were only vaguely understood. Quite widely varying ideas of ecclesiology also existed in both congregations and consequently it was difficult for any discussions to begin at a common point other than quite rudimentary ones.

1978

By 1978 the position taken by the Council of Elders, that one congregation meant one worshipping place, was being openly rejected by vocal members of the Mount Road congregation. The Mount Road elders struggled with this. They had been elected as members of a body that had not existed previously in Methodist tradition and anyway the people elected had not been drawn from the ranks of the traditional leaders of that congregation. So neither their role nor the individuals were able to draw upon the respect and acceptance of authority from the congregation. This resulted in the establishment of an 'underground' opposition and *de facto* leadership being exercised at Mount Road, although this development wasn't fully appreciated by the Council of Elders and the ministers at the time.

During 1978 questionnaires had been devised to gather the congregations' opinions; unfortunately, all these seemed to do was reinforce the growing ambivalence of the congregations and led to arguments over the interpretation of the results. However, both ministers and most of the elders came to an interim conclusion that the united congregation probably should locate itself at the Keilor Road site.

By October 1978 patience amongst the elders was wearing very thin, and it was argued by some elders that a decision had to be made before Christmas. Not making a decision was debilitating, they argued. But no decision was made by the Council of Elders then. Instead, plans were made for a major congregational educational process and a decision-making day in August 1979. The elders resolved that the decision about the future of the congregations should be made after as much preparation as possible, including two periods of about eight weeks each in which the two congregations would worship together for all services at each site in turn. At the same time, a non-traditional service was to be introduced alongside the traditional 11 am service and 7 pm evening service. A co-ordinating committee was set up comprising members of both councils of elders and an enormous amount of work and planning was put into the development of educational programs based on theological and mission concepts.

Both congregations attended the combined services reasonably well, and numbers were not dramatically lower than would have been the case if they had been worshipping in 'their own' buildings, which was somewhat surprising. This gave some heart to the Council of Elders in their working towards a decision.

However, the period given to educational programs leading up to August 1979's decision extended the opportunity for the non-elected and unofficial leaders of the Mount Road congregation to work behind closed doors to persuade other members of the congregation to vote against anything that would see the Mount Road site closed or not used for worship.

The whole process of study, investigation, and discussion and the experiments with worship were the catalyst for considerable enthusiasm and a sense of renewal amongst a number of key elders from both congregations. They found the whole exercise quite exhilarating and it gave them a sense that 'at last' the church was 'getting on with something.' All the elders put an enormous amount of energy and time into the whole process.

The more that the elders became enthused and the more that they could see a viable future for the church in the proposed amalgamation and renewal of the congregation, the less, I think, that they were able to appreciate the nuances of culture and to see the forces actively working against them. The understanding of change management that has become so important in business, government and in the church was not part of their thinking, and it was felt that the 'obvious rightness' of the amalgamation/renewal cause, both theologically and practically, would carry the day with everyone.

A survey was conducted at the end of the first period of four months of joint worship services. The 11 am service remained the most popular service by far, but with a steadily increasing number of people attending the 9.30 am service. But there was a disappointingly low percentage of both congregations that bothered to remain for the in-between 'cuppa'.

As the end of the four month trial approached the elders became aware, given that the decision whether to finally unite the congregations was to be held on the first Sunday in August, that there was going to be an interregnum in which the combined services would stop

and people would revert to their old separate worship gatherings. Obviously this was not going to serve the unification process, so it was decided that the combined services would be extended until the end of July and be held at the Mount Road congregation. Then the council resolved to run a four-week education and meeting program for the congregation during the extra month's combined services.

On the first Sunday, 8 July, a statement on the relative merits of both properties was to be distributed. The next Sunday a statement on mission was to be distributed and introduced. A congregational meeting was to be held following the service for the purposes of discussing the properties report. On the third Sunday the Council, which had resolved that it had to present a single recommendation for action to the two congregations, would present its recommendation and reasons for that recommendation for the future, and a congregational meeting was to be held to discuss the mission statement. And on the last Sunday in July a congregational meeting was to be held to discuss the council's recommendation and reasons. Then, finally, the 'decision day' would happen on the following Sunday, 5 August.

For the third Sunday's program, the Council presented in writing its recommendation to the congregations for their decision. It was a very positive statement, and it ended by recommending the Keilor Road site for the one worshipping place.

> Following the process of evaluation, it was moved that the Council recommend … one congregation, consolidated through all worship at Keilor Road to the congregations. Before the

> motion was put the Council spent five minutes in silent prayer. the motion was then put and it succeeded by a vote of 19 to 6 with 2 abstentions. By a vote of 19 to 3 the Council agreed that there was sufficient consensus to indicate a leading of the Holy Spirit and therefore for the recommendation to be put to the congregations.[1]

The Council was aware of the background machinations and rumblings by now, but felt it had to rely upon the good will and rationality of the congregations.

Decision day: Sunday 5 August 1979

The congregations met together in a local private school's hall. A series of options would be presented to the combined congregation, although votes from each congregation would be counted separately. The options would be voted on exhaustively until a 60% positive vote from both congregations was recorded for one option. There were 169 confirmed members from the two congregations who attended, and postal votes were allowed.

Six options covering every possible combination of outcomes were put to the joint congregations after a brief worship service. The result of the first ballot was that 93% of the Keilor Road people voted for one congregation worshipping at Keilor Road and 89% of Mount Road people voted for one congregation worshipping at Mount Road. A second round of votes were cast and the results were just the same.

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[1] Text from the original letter to the congregations, 22 July 1979.

By lunchtime, and everyone was feeling exasperated. So we had a break, whereupon nearly 20% of the congregations went home. Fortunately, those who were left had roughly equal numbers of both congregations' members.

The third round of voting achieved no change in people's opinions. By this time tempers were well and truly frayed. One of the ministers then tried to adjourn the meeting for another go in six weeks' time. That failed. Then the 'argy-bargy' started with one person or another getting up to propose a new tactic. Confusion reigned, until in the end someone suggested that the only answer was to continue with one congregation but worshipping at the two sites. That was supported by about 70% of the people, so the meeting came to an end by 3.45 pm.

Aftermath

There was an extraordinarily strong feeling of disappointment and considerable anger immediately following the 'decision day'.

Bruce Prewer was quite devastated by the failure of the congregations to respond to the mission challenge and the opportunity for renewal, as he saw it. On the following Sunday, it was his turn to preach at the combined congregations' 11 am service. After a great deal of personal struggle he prepared a sermon entitled "Be Angry and Sin Not". Dressed in sackcloth and ashes, he preached for 30 minutes, and he was very blunt indeed about people's attitudes, especially the "false shepherds" whom he said had misled the congregation. The

response to the sermon was not encouraging, to say the least.

Things began to fly apart: the centre that was the Council of Elders could not hold. A week after the so-called 'decision day', the Council of Elders met at the Mount Road property. A 'proposal for advance' for the meeting was prepared by the ministers. The proposal tried to address the struggle within the Council of Elders as to its role and the direction forward; it tried to hold out some hope. They were brave but desperate words, and words that could not be translated into action. On the night that these words were presented to the Council the pain and stress of the struggle took their toll. A dedicated Mount Road elder, who had tried hard to balance her love for the people of Mount Road, where she had worshipped since she had been a girl, with a passionate desire to help create a lively, serving church, tendered a letter requesting a year's leave of absence on health grounds. A second Mount Road elder who had struggled mightily with the criticism that he received from some of the Mount Road congregation that he didn't represent them "properly", tendered his resignation on the grounds that he was unable "to devote the necessary time" to the work.

Unfortunately the Council, frustrated and angry, then moved to reject the outcome of the 'decision day'. Before the vote was taken and after much heated discussion, the meeting adjourned until the following week. When they met again several apologies were received right at the start. The first item after the reception of the minutes of the previous meeting was a letter of resignation from another Mount Road elder. Even more

ominously, however, was the second item: a letter from Bruce Prewer requesting that he be allocated duties in other parts of the parish because of difficulties experienced as a reaction to the troubles. This was deferred, allowing for further discussion of the meaning of the votes on 5 August. It was unanimously agreed that the council accept the congregations' vote to form one congregation but reject the vote to have two worship centres. They decided to resubmit the question of the location of worship to a postal preferential vote by the congregation. Their final act that night was to request Bruce Prewer to reconsider his request.

When the postal preferential votes were counted, the Council of Elders ignored the fact that 69% of the Mount Road votes were for one congregation on the Mount Road site, and counted the second preferences. These resulted in 142 votes (63%) for Keilor Road and 82 votes (37%) for Mount Road. When the Council of Elders met in September they voted 2:1 in favour of locating all worship at Keilor Road, with some elders abstaining. This was despite the fact that they had received a petition from Mount Road members objecting to any move to Keilor Road and a presentation from two members who said they had surveyed more than 80 members of Mount Road who held the same view.

In a letter to all congregational members, the Council stated that "the Council has accepted the result as a clear expression that the majority of the congregation wish to locate all worship at Keilor Road" and that it had recommended to the Parish Council that "all worship should be located at Keilor Road from the first Sunday in November onwards".

However, under the then rules of the UCA, they had to receive the blessing of the Parish Council which was seen as the final arbiter on the matter. Well, the Parish Council made a decision: the Parish Council rejected the recommendation to locate all worship at Keilor Road from November by a vote of 13 to 12. It then made some plans to resolve the situation by referring the matter to the Presbytery and asking all North Essendon congregation members to sign a covenant to honour the decision of the Presbytery commission.

However, before the Parish Council could implement these plans, the Council of Elders met on Monday, 22 October and received the bad news that Bruce Prewer was in hospital, exhausted by the stress and by the bitterness shown towards him by some members of the congregation. He wrote to the Parish Council and the Council of Elders indicating that he would need to take a period of sick leave and that, on his return, he would no longer be able to act as the pastoral minister of the North Essendon congregation.

Taking all this into consideration, and the Parish Council's resolutions and plans, the Council of Elders finally decided that it would fall from its previous decision to locate all worship at Keilor Road and, instead, planned to use both Keilor Road and Mount Road for worship services from the beginning of November. The report to the Parish Council meeting has one single sentence on this: "The decision was not taken lightly; however, it was felt that there was no advantage to be gained in prolonging the anxiety by not making a final decision".

Conclusion

The Rev. Bruce Prewer recovered well in time and went on to serve very successfully in the St John's Essendon congregation for a short time and later was called to minister in Pilgrim Church, Adelaide. After a lengthy stay in Adelaide, he concluded his years of ministry in country Victoria and is now in retirement in Sunbury. He continues to write and produce much-valued books of Australian prayers.

The Essendon Parish folded some years later, and all the former Methodist properties were eventually sold as the congregations folded and the remaining members merged with either St John's or Keilor Road congregation. The sale proceeds from the sale of the former Methodist properties were used to renew the Keilor Road church and a number of new facilities.

What was gained, what was lost? One would hope that we have learned something about change management and perhaps some better, positive ways of getting out of a difficult situation and not becoming entrenched in the rightness of one's own position; however, for the Uniting Church in North Essendon, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that very much was lost indeed.

Within the churches, understanding of change management was at an embryonic stage. While some were aware of the potential problems associated with attachment to buildings and to existing denominational cultures, proponents of union did not effectively tackle these. They operated on the conviction that sound theological argument and new understandings of God's mission would bring people around when change was

needed. This paper tells the story of two congregations that did not understand the ramifications of change management, and as a result failed to realise what they had hoped for from union.[1]

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[1] This paper is based on a shorter article that was written for the *Proceedings of the Uniting Church Historical Society, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*, Vol. 11, No. 2, December 2004, and a much longer unpublished paper held by the author. The author acknowledges with sincere gratitude the assistance of the Rev. Bruce Prewer in the preparation of the original article on which this paper is based. In the original events, Bruce provided enormously important positive leadership and experienced considerable anguish when things went wrong. I kept copies of the minutes, correspondence and other publications, including personal notes that I made at the time and these provide the source for all the information herein contained.

LGBTIQ PILGRIMS AND THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Warren Talbot

Abstract

LGBTIQ[1] pilgrims were present but invisible at the inauguration of the Uniting Church at the Sydney Town Hall 40 years ago. That changed in less than five years. Synod social justice agencies in NSW and Victoria were required to take positions on homosexual law reform. They supported equality. In 1981, one open and proud LGBTIQ pilgrim, Cecily Moreton, was recommended for ordination, sparking a national inquiry into homosexuality and the church.

Three national studies and 25 years later, in 2006 the national Assembly reached a historic settlement for LGBTIQ pilgrims. Suitable LGBTIQ people, including those in committed same sex relationships, could be ordained and placed—or not.

Meanwhile, in pilgrim-land, we established our own organisations and, in 1994, a national LGBTIQ network. This is a remarkable movement of a marginalised minority claiming its voice in the life of the Uniting Church. We

[1] I am using the term 'LGBTIQ' (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) throughout as this has become the most common, though not universal, acronym applied to the communities of mutual interest based around sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex status. Where I am referring to, or quoting specific documents or organisations, I will use the terms as used at the time. I will sometimes only use 'LGB' or 'gay and lesbian' when the specific matter refers only to sexual orientation.

were seeking pastoral support, education and equality, not to mention compatible sexual partners.

Forty years on we have visibility but not full equality. All LGBTIQ persons are systematically excluded from a significant ritual of the Church: marriage. Presbyteries are free to not ordain, and congregations not place, solely on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. But LGBTIQ pilgrims have cause for hope. We have been on the boundary. We have crossed many during the past 40 years. We are still "the people of God on the way to the promised end".

Introduction

Homosexuality has been one of the most debated and contested concerns in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA).[1] Although many reports and articles refer to the 'sexuality debate', other matters of human sexuality such as divorce, re-marriage, sexual expression before or outside of marriage, have not attracted the same degree of controversy and intense divisions as same-sex relationships. In the preface to the history of the UCA after 25 years, William and Susan Emilsen note that the idea for the history began when they "observed

[1] There were several reports and resolutions in the three antecedent churches. For an overview of those see Hannah-Jones, Avril M., *Divided We Stand: The Sexuality Debate in the Uniting Church in Australia 1977-2000*, unpub. PhD thesis, History Department, University of Melbourne, 2003, pp. 57-58. Cowan, Malcolm, " 'Knowing' Sodom? Australian Churches and Homosexuality", in Wotherspoon, Gary., (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III: Essays in Australian Culture,* Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, Sydney, 1996, pp.76-91.

the different synods' responses to the sexuality debate".[1] Each of the contributions to that history make some references, in varying detail, to the sexuality debate. In reviewing the 'DNA' of the UCA after 40 years, John Squires offers a positive version of the "enduring controversy" on sexuality suggesting that "we have learned how to debate with respect and dignity"[2], whereas Julia Pitman refers to the sexuality debate as the "most destructive debate in the history of the three former denominations and the Uniting Church".[3]

In the 2016 collection of UCA justice statements decisions on sexuality are grouped in a section entitled "Seeking to Live Justly as a Church". Colleen Geyer suggests that the statements "demonstrate some of our struggles as we have sought to match our own life with the words we speak out into the world about justice, inclusion and solidarity".[4] Six thousand UCA members are reported to have left the Uniting Church over sexuality issues, while many evangelical members were

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[1] Emilsen, W.W. and Emilsen, S. (eds.), *The Uniting Church in Australia: The First 25 Years*, circa (an imprint of Melbourne Publishing Group), Armadale, 2003, p.xi.

[2] Squires, John, "The DNA of the UCA", 12 April 2017, https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/2611-the-dna-of-the-uca . Accessed 10 July 2017.

[3] Pitman, Julia, "South Australia", Emilsen, W.W. and Emilsen, S. (eds.), *The Uniting Church in Australia: The First 25 Years*, circa (an imprint of Melbourne Publishing Group), Armadale, 2003, pp.130-158.

[4] Geyer, Colleen, "Seeking to Live Justly as a Church", Coghill, Cynthia and Poulos, Elenie (eds.), *For a World Reconciled*, Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, Sydney, 2016, p.304.

dissatisfied and founded organisations within the UCA with the aim of providing "constitutional dissent".[1]

The broad argument in this paper is that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people were present at the inauguration of the UCA in 1977 but largely invisible. Forty years on we are now visible in the life of the Uniting Church but still not fully equal. I argue this primarily as an insider activist given my context as an openly gay man who has been a member of the UCA for most of its 40 years and an active participant in formal Church sexuality committees as well as the Uniting Network.

Avril Hannah-Jones has noted that "We [LGBTIQ people] are liminal people. We refuse to be considered either Christian or glbt [gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender]; and so we overcome one divide among identities…. We share the struggles for justice with people whose identities are not ours."[2] I have previously used the image of being 'on the boundary' to refer to gay religious groups in Australia[3], though it also captures the situation of individual LGBTIQ people, and our peer networks in the UCA. As I write (October 2017) Australians are participating in a postal survey concerning marriage equality. The UCA is offering no specific advice to Church members, which is considerably better than most other churches

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[1] Breward, Ian, "Evangelical Christianity", Emilsen, W.W., (ed.), *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church at the Beginning of the 21ST Century*, Mosaic Press, Preston, 2016, pp. 297-310.

[2] Hannah-Jones, Avril, "Editorial", *Daring to Speak*, October 2001, Uniting Network, Parkville, p.1.

[3] Talbot, Warren, "On the Boundary: Gay Religious Groups in Australia", *Australian Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1992, pp.54-61.

(except the Religious Society of Friends) who are formally urging a 'no' vote. The fact that all LGBTIQ members are systemically excluded from a significant ritual of the UCA is a reminder that there is still work to be done to achieve full equality and just treatment in the Uniting Church.

Social and political change takes place in a wide range of ways. For this paper I have selected four domains relating to efforts to remove boundaries based on sexual orientation.[1] The domains include the honesty and courage of an individual coming out; responses to external pressures for change; peer group support, networking and advocacy; and formal institutional responses. The invisibility of LGBTIQ people in 1977 was to change within three to four years. The first challenge was external in the form of moves to decriminalise sexual behaviour between consenting male adults in NSW and Victoria[2]. But the more significant challenge for long-term theological and ecclesial change came from within the life of the Church itself.

Coming Out: individual honesty and courage

It has long been an axiom of the LGBTIQ movements that the most distinctive personal and political experience for LGBTIQ people is the decision, at different times and in various ways, to 'come out' and self-identify in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex

[1] More research is required to document case-studies which include transgender and intersex people.

[2] Pitman notes the differences in responses to homosexual law reform between the SA and Victorian synods, given that SA was the only state to implement reform prior to the establishment of the UCA. Pitman, Julia, *South Australia*, *op.cit*., p.148.

status.[1] As Rod Smith correctly observes in his review of the UCA Assembly after 25 years: "As gay and lesbian 'coming out' became more common in wider Australian society, the likelihood of Church members also openly acknowledging their homosexuality increased."[2]

It was a tense moment at the meeting of the Presbytery of Yarra Valley (Synod of Victoria) in early 1981 when a member rose to ask a question of the Candidates Committee. The Committee had presented recommendations that several qualified candidates proceed to ordination. One of the candidates deemed fully qualified and suitable to be ordained was Cecily Moreton. The question asked from the floor of the Presbytery was: "Is it the case that Cecily Moreton is a practising homosexual?".[3] For LGB people in the church this has been a common and notorious question, suggesting a false dichotomy between our sexual identities and the authentic expression of that sexuality. The view was summarised in the slogan "love the sinner and hate the sin". The Candidates Committee did not wish to be drawn into that discussion. By the end of business, the Presbytery had voted to seek guidance on the possible ordination of homosexuals from the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC).[4]

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[1] Cass, Vivienne, "Homosexual Identity Formation: A theoretical model", *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1979, Vol. 4, pp. 219-235.

[2] Smith, Rod, "Assembly", Emilsen, W.W. and Emilsen, S. (eds.), *The Uniting Church*, *op.cit*., 2003, p.27.

[3] The writer was a member of the Presbytery of Yarra Valley and present at the meeting. Cecily Moreton's name is used with permission.

[4] Dicker, Gordon S., (ed.), *Homosexuality and the Church: A Report of the Assembly Committee on Homosexuality and the Church*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp.11-12.

Cecily Moreton had been a candidate with the Presbyterian Church, but since church union her marriage had ended, and she had come to a realisation of her lesbianism. By 1981 Cecily was in a committed relationship with another woman and both Cecily and her partner were active members of the Fitzroy Uniting Church in Melbourne. In addition, Cecily had worked with me in 1979 to jointly found the Victorian Gay Christian Collective[1] and had undertaken research on the pastoral needs of LGBTIQ Christians in Australia, later published by the Victorian Synod and the Assembly Committee on Homosexuality and the Church.[2] Cecily was not seeking publicity, *per se*, but living her life with honesty and integrity. Most LGBTIQ people in the churches prior to that lived a life which involved concealing their identity some or most of the time, often as a matter of sheer survival.

As time passed, and the Uniting Church's differences over homosexuality deepened, Cecily Moreton resigned and pursued an effective professional career elsewhere. That has been a common occurrence with LGBTIQ individuals in the Uniting Church. A later comparable situation involved Simon Moglia, a youth worker at the Pilgrim Uniting Church in Adelaide.[3]

The outcomes of the referral of the matter to the Assembly Standing Committee by the Presbytery of Yarra Valley included a carefully worded resolution designed

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[1] Gay Community News, "Melbourne's Gay Christian Collective", May 1980, p.9.

[2] Moreton, Cecily, "An exercise in Practical Theology", Talbot, W., (ed.), *Affirming Faith, op.cit.,* 1984, pp.15-19. Dicker, *Homosexuality*, *op.cit.*, 1985, pp.64-67.

[3] Pitman, *South Australia*, op.*cit.,* pp.148-149.

to satisfy conservatives and liberals, and the establishment of the Committee on "Homosexuality and the Church" chaired by Gordon Dicker.[1] Although at least three LGB people served on the Committee, only one openly LGBTIQ person (Meredith Knight from the Pitt Street Uniting Church) agreed to their name being published in the final 1988 report. As the debate continued in the Uniting Church so did the number of members (including clergy) willing and able to be open about their identities.

Law reform: external pressure for change

From 1975 to 1997 Australia's six states made changes to their criminal codes to implement what is generically summarised as 'homosexual law reform'.[2] The term covers removal of laws which criminalised sexual behaviours between consenting male adults, though not always establishing full equality with either heterosexual or lesbian sexual relations.[3] Although using a range of titles, which changed over time, in 1977 each Synod had established an agency responsible for social justice and responsibility. When the possibility of homosexual law reform became more immediate, the issue

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[1] Dicker, Gordon S., *Homosexuality Responses: Responses from the Uniting Church in Australia to a Committee on Homosexuality and the Church*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne,1988. This includes the original 1985 Report and responses and lists some of the names of members of the Committee.

[2] For an overview of homosexual law reform in Australia see Carbery, Graham, *Towards Homosexual Equality in Australian Criminal Law*, Revised second edition, Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Melbourne, 2014.

[3] For example, in NSW a higher age of consent for male-to-male sexual conduct was maintained for several years. *Ibid.*, p.33.

was responded to by the Board for Responsibility (BSR) and the Division of Social Justice (DSJ) in NSW and Victoria respectively.

Victoria changed the law in 1981. In response to requests the DSJ Education Officer, the Rev. Stuart Reid, prepared a kit of resources on homosexuality which was made available to congregations. Although there was a largely church-based campaign against the changes, homosexual law reform was introduced by the then Liberal Government and passed by the Parliament with the support of the Labor Opposition.

Stuart Reid had extensive experience in marriage enrichment and sexuality education and decided to use the focus provided by homosexual law reform to commence a wider dialogue in the church on homosexuality.[1] The DSJ Committee agreed to establish a Homosexuality Task Group to which several gay and lesbian UCA members (including clergy) were appointed.[2] With staff support from Reid, the Task Group undertook an active program of educational sessions within the Synod, publications, a submission to the Dicker Committee and a successful Synod resolution supporting a change to equal opportunity laws to include homosexuality.[3] Reid was later to become a member and then secretary of the Assembly Sexuality Task Group established in 1991 by the Sixth Assembly.

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[1] Reid, Stuart, "Preface" in Talbot, *Affirming Faith*, op.*cit.,* 1984, p.4.
[2] I was appointed in 1982.
[3] Uniting Church Synod of Victoria, Minutes and Meeting Papers, 1986.

Homosexual law reform was achieved in NSW in 1984 by means of a Private Member's Bill introduced by the Premier. The Board for Social Responsibility had commenced some low-key work in 1978 under the Board's General Secretary, the Rev. Gordon Trickett, but this came into focus when the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board published a major report on discrimination and homosexuality in 1982. Uniquely, the NSW Parliament added homosexuality to the Anti-Discrimination Act in 1982 while male homosexual behaviour was still proscribed in the criminal code. The BSR supported anti-discrimination law reform even though the Synod Standing Committee had requested it to remain silent on the issue.[1] This was a bold move given the Standing Committee request, and the fact that in Sydney the Anglican diocese joined the Catholics in opposing any changes leaving the Uniting Church and Quakers in a distinct ecclesial minority.

Gordon Trickett, like Stuart Reid in Victoria, played a key role beyond the formal limits of leading a social justice agency. Gordon was a founding member of Cross Section in 1982 (see below) a group which fulfilled some of the functions of the Homosexuality Task Group in Victoria. In addition, he was a member of the Dicker Committee on Homosexuality and the Church. Gordon Trickett's successor at the BSR, the Rev. Harry Herbert has written that "the Board [under Trickett's tenure] was not interested in putting different points of view but wanted to promote the human rights of homosexual people".[2]

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[1] Herbert, H., *Uniting 1910-2012 Reflections*, Uniting, Sydney, 2017, p.61.
[2] *Ibid.*

In both Victoria and NSW, the external pressure for change (law reform) enabled those in leadership positions in social justice agencies to not only support reform, but to build support for wider changes in the Church concerning homosexuality and LGBTIQ people.

Support and advocacy networks: LGBTIQ people find a voice

In March 1982 a group of about fifteen Uniting Church members met in the manse of the Haberfield Uniting Church in Sydney's inner west. It might have been the mid-week prayer meeting or bible study but was in fact the first UCA support and advocacy organisation established by LGBTIQ people and our straight allies.[1] After considering the name "UniGays" (there was a Sydney Anglican group called "AngGays" at the time) the members settled on the name "Cross Section". Intentionally or otherwise they were using the same name as Australia's first Christian LGBTIQ organisation, which was formed in 1973 as a part of CAMP NSW.[2]

It is obvious from the early minutes of the UCA Cross Section that the concerns of the group included mutual support but also education of the wider Uniting Church and participation in the broad LGBTIQ communities. For example, Cross Section sought, and eventually achieved, official recognition as a group relating to the Board of

[1] Cross Section Minutes, 11 March 1982. Copy in W Talbot's files.
[2] CAMP NSW, "Homosexuals report back: a report / by a sub-group of Cross+Section, the church group with CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution)", 1974, N.S.W. Branch, Sydney.

Education within the Synod of NSW/ACT.[1] By 1986 comparable groups had been formed in the SA ("Unity") and WA ("Friends") Synods. A Victorian group ("Connexions") formed later as some of the functions were fulfilled by the Homosexuality Task Group and the Gay Christian Collective referred to above. In 1994 there were groups in each Synod, and the first national "Daring conference" was held at the Brougham Place Uniting Church in Adelaide. It was not, as claimed by the *Australian* newspaper a "secret meeting", as it had been advertised widely in Synod and gay community papers.[2] The first Daring conference resulted in the establishment of a national network with future conferences being held every two years.[3] The national network achieved visibility and advocacy within the Uniting Church for LGBTIQ people at the institutional level in a way in which individual coming out generally could not.[4]

The twelfth Daring conference was held in Melbourne in June 2016. Each conference has focussed on a broad theme sometimes commencing with the words "Daring to…". For example, the first conference had the theme "Daring to speak, daring to listen" given that it was the first time that LGBTIQ people and our allies had met on

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[1] Uniting Church Synod of NSW/ACT, Letter from the General Secretary to Cross Section, 14 Jan. 1991.

[2] Williams, Sue, 'The Quest of Warren Talbot', *Australian Magazine* (Sydney), 27-28 May 1995, p.28.

[3] Uniting Network has changed its name several times, for example, adding "intersex" people in 2010 and "queer" in 2015. For ease of reference I am using "Uniting Network Australia" (UNA) for the national group.

[4] The exception to this general statement is the profile achieved by the Rev. Dr Dorothy McRae-McMahon.

a national basis in order to 'speak' to the wider Uniting Church. One focus for the latter has been a 'daring statement' issued at the end of each daring conference. These statements have generally been of a broad vision of what conference participants believed the Church needed to hear. They provide a valuable snapshot of the changing concerns and interests of LGBTIQ members of the UCA since 1994.[1]

At the national level Uniting Network soon developed a sense of its role as the national voice of LGBTIQ people in the UCA. The founding co-convenors were the Rev. Dr Coralie Ling and Simon Moglia. At the second Daring Conference, held at Wesley Uniting in Melbourne, there was extended discussion on the interim report of the Assembly Sexuality Task Group, including a dialogue with the Task Group Chairperson the Rev. Alistair McRae. Most Daring conferences have included a discussion session with the President of the Assembly and Synod leaders (Moderator and/or General Secretary).

In the lead up to the Seventh Assembly (Perth, 1997) at which the final report of the Assembly Sexuality Task Group was to be discussed, UNA requested observer status at the Assembly. The Assembly leadership agreed that there would be two UNA representatives with speaking but not voting rights about sexuality. In a mistaken attempt to be even-handed the Assembly leaders also agreed that two "ex-homosexuals" would be invited on the same basis. At a special meeting of members held at the Fitzroy Uniting Church UNA nominated Ineka

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[1] www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au/daring-statements . Accessed 19 Sept. 2016.

Bergsma (Cross Section, Pitt Street Uniting) and Malcolm Cowan (Unity SA) to be its representatives. The Seventh Assembly has been variously described as the "sexuality Assembly" or the "Assembly of tears".[1] From the perspective of LGBTIQ Church members the Perth Assembly was a disappointment. The only proposal which directly addressed LGBTIQ concerns (to commence work on a liturgy of blessing for same-sex couples) was withdrawn by the ASTG in the interests of church unity.

The disappointment found expression in a Uniting Network associated entry in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in February 1998. Mainly organised by the Rev. Rod Pattenden from the Paddington Uniting Church, participants decided to join the annual parade marching behind a large banner simply entitled "Members of the Uniting Church", using the UCA emblem. Organisers received a call from the Synod office advising that they did not have permission to use the emblem. Following an impassioned meeting at the Paddington Uniting Church on the evening before the parade, the members reluctantly decided to remove the emblem from their banner. Thus, they proudly marched up Oxford St carrying the banner with a large gaping hole in the middle.[2] The first Uniting Network float was in 1988 and then seven between 1998 and 2004. Impatience with the wider Church was evident with the 2001 theme: "dragging the church into the twentieth century".

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[1] Mavor, John, "Learning to Live in the Tension: The Uniting Church, 1997-2000", *Uniting Church Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2009, p.58. Hannah-Jones, *Divided We Stand*, op.*cit*., 2003, p.7.

[2] Elizabeth Teece, personal communication, 17 February 2017. "A God who can dance", *Insights*, April 1998, p.10.
Insights, 1998, p.10.

Uniting Network floats were revived in 2015 using the theme "LGBTIQ refugees are welcome here" to bring together concerns for LGBTIQ equality and the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, which was a major concern for the wider Uniting Church. The UCA emblem was used – without comment.

One issue which has always been of immediate concern to UNA members is the way in which our relationships and families were to be recognised by the Church. Following the 1997 Assembly meeting there was no official progress in the Uniting Church on liturgical recognition of same sex relationships. In 2010 UNA published a booklet with a range of options for what was referred to as a Sacred Union for same-sex couples.[1] The same year, at the Ninth Daring Conference, a sacred union service for three same-sex couples was celebrated by Coralie Ling at the Brunswick Uniting Church in Melbourne. Since then, however, most UNA members have given staunch support for moves for civil marriage equality, and now advocate for the Uniting Church to change the national policy on marriage to permit same-sex ecclesial marriage.

Institutional responses

Most LGBTIQ people take a period of time to come out to themselves, close family members and friends, and possibly then work colleagues and others. This is a

[1] Jenski, Leanne, Stringer, Robert, Talbot, Warren, and Wickham, Sue, *Sacred Union Ceremony: towards pastoral and liturgical recognition for gay and lesbian couples in the Uniting Church in Australia*, Uniting Network Australia, Sydney, 2010.

process which can take years and is never truly concluded.[1] It is not surprising, therefore, that institutions also take time to change. From the above discussion a significant amount of the change in the Uniting Church has been the result of a reaction or response to pressures: individuals coming out, external legal changes, and advocacy and visibility by LGBTIQ networks.

Legal reforms were overwhelmingly responded to in the synod sphere whereas coming out and advocacy impacted on local congregations and all councils of the Church.

In the cases of Cecily Moreton, Simon Moglia and others, responses were required by their local congregations, presbyteries, synods and the Assembly. That invariably involved establishing committees of inquiry into the individual and/or the subject of homosexuality and the church. One individual who came out was excommunicated from his local congregation and an appeal against that decision to the presbytery was unsuccessful.[2] The more common experience has been that members simply drift away from a congregation which did not welcome them. A small number of UCA congregations declared that they were open and affirming with the Uniting Network maintaining lists of those congregations and supportive clergy.[3]

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[1] Cass, *Homosexual Identity*, *op.cit.*

[2] Dudgeon, Don, " 'Getting involved', Gay issues in the Uniting Church", no date, MAG (Mature Aged Gays) Sydney. http://www.magsydney.org/article.php?id=502 Accessed 24 April 2017.

[3] Uniting Network NSW/ACT, Open and Affirming Congregations, brochure, unpub., Sydney, 2003.

Synods have responded in a range of diverse ways, as observed by William Emilsen at the Eighth Assembly. Many Church reports were well-researched and wide-ranging, but the focus of decision-making often tended to resolve around whether to endorse or not a seven-word statement ("celibacy in singleness and fidelity in [heterosexual] marriage") as the required standard for Uniting Church members and/or ordained ministers. Victoria commenced a process of consideration in 1986 with a joint report from the Division of Social Justice and the Doctrine and Liturgy Committee of the Synod. After several years, the synod decided to not endorse "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in [heterosexual] marriage". In contrast the QLD synod did endorse the seven word 'policy' and that remains the position of that synod, though about one-third of QLD synod members recorded their dissent in the minutes. Tasmania discussed the seven words but could not reach consensus. NSW did not debate the seven words. A positive proposal to not discriminate solely on the grounds of sexual orientation was considered but did not proceed under consensus decision-making.

There have been three national committees examining (homo)sexuality and numerous Assembly resolutions, reports and papers for which there is not enough space to examine here.[1] My judgement is that none of the reports or the many resolutions altered the prescience of

[1] UCA Assembly, National Working Group on Doctrine, 2009, "Sexuality and Leadership: Documenting the History", www.nat.uca.org.au Accessed 21 Sept. 2016. Perhaps the major report was the final report of the Assembly Sexuality Task Group, *Uniting Sexuality and Faith*, Final Report, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1997.

the original resolution of the ASC in response to the 1981 request from the Presbytery of Yarra Valley. As such, that short resolution is worth reproducing:

> Standing Committee advises the Presbytery that in its view the sexual orientation of the candidate is not and has not been in itself a bar to ordination. A decision on the suitability of a candidate may of course depend among other things on the manner in which his or her sexuality is expressed.[1]

Concluding comments

During the first 40 years of the UCA many boundaries have been crossed regarding homosexuality and equal participation of LGBTIQ people. Individuals have come out in several places and been welcomed and affirmed. Legal equality has been supported. Most reports, whether modestly or in a more visionary manner, have generally moved in the direction of welcoming and affirming LGBTIQ people. As but one example, the Presbytery of Sydney which had previously supported "celibacy in singleness and fidelity in [heterosexual] marriage" now has three openly LGBTIQ clergy in same-sex relationships and exercising leadership in both the church and the wider LGBTIQ communities.[2] The overall story is one of progress towards full equality for LGBTIQ people in the UCA.

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[1] Dicker, *Homosexuality*, *op.cit.*, 1985, p.11.

[2] Paddington Uniting Church, Balmain Uniting Church, Pitt Street Uniting Church.

As a pilgrim people committed to LGBTIQ equality[1] three major challenges remain in the coming years. First, although the 1982 decision of the ASC has been very effective in preventing restrictive categories on groups of people who might be ordained, it is now inadequate. In the same way that congregations and presbyteries cannot refuse a ministerial placement solely on the grounds of sex, that approach needs to be extended to sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Second, LGBTIQ people will never be fully equal in the life, witness and mission of the Uniting Church while all LGBTIQ are systemically excluded from the church's marriage rite. Third, although the letters "T" and "I" have been added to our vocabulary, there is a need for sustained efforts to better understand both gender identity and intersex status and to fully welcome transgender and intersex people.

Forty years on there are solid grounds to be confident that the UCA will respond to these three challenges as a "pilgrim people on the way to the promised end".[2]

Warren Talbot, BA (Hons), GradBEdStuds, Dip.Ed., is the national secretary of the Uniting Church LGBTIQ Network. Warren was Executive Director of the Federation of AIDS Organisations and ED of the National LGBTI Health Alliance.

[1] The current national President, Stuart McMillan, confirmed this commitment in an open letter dated 12 August 2015 following the Fourteenth Assembly in Perth.

[2] UCA Basis of Union, Inclusive language edition, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1982, final paragraph.

ON WRITING *FIGHTING SPIRIT: A HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AT WARRUWI, GOULBURN ISLAND*

William W. Emilsen

My involvement with Goulburn Island's history happened almost by accident. About eight years ago (around the time of the Northern Territory Intervention) some friends in Darwin mentioned that 2016 was the centenary of Methodist Missions in Arnhem Land. One thing led to another and after meeting with members of the National Regional Council of Congress (that's the Aboriginal presbytery in the Northern Synod) and discussions with leaders of the Northern Synod and the Goulburn Island congregation, I found myself being invited to write a history of Warruwi—a small island with a permanent population of about 250 people situated about 200km north-east of Darwin just off the mainland. ("Warruwi" is the Aboriginal name for South Goulburn Island and also the name for the township there.) I was also asked to collect photos of the people and to prepare a DVD depicting the history of the island.

Challenges

From the beginning, I realised that this was not going to be an easy assignment. There were a considerable number of challenges. I had been asked to take into consideration the Aboriginal 'voice' in the history; how was I to do this when there were very few written records left by Aboriginal people? It is one thing to read documents 'against the grain', it is another to put it into practice.

Moreover, I soon discovered that there were three communities that I needed to consider in the history—the Indigenous community, the Pacific Islander community (Fijians, Samoans and Baduans from the Torres Strait) and the white community (missionaries, traders and administrators.)

I was asked to write a history of the church at Warruwi, but how was I to do that when it wasn't even clear to me what 'church' meant to the people on Goulburn Island? Yes, the people met for worship but they didn't always meet in a church building. Notions of church membership didn't carry a lot of weight. Regular weekly giving was almost a foreign idea. I had to be careful not to impose my understanding of church on the community.

I was also an 'outsider'—in some ways, an oddity because I was not linked into the community's traditional kinship structure and their culture and language were foreign to me.

And then there were misunderstandings about the nature of history itself; 'stories' are important; everybody in the North, white and black, talk of history in terms of stories but history is not the same as stories.

Another challenge was deciding on an end point for the history because the Warruwi church has a continuing history. I decided to conclude the history in the late 1970s, mainly because the rich archival sources that exist up to the late 1970s are not there after the 1980s. The late 1970s was also a good ending point because it coincided with the time when the Methodist Missions handed over control of the community to Indigenous

people and when the Methodist Church entered into the Uniting Church.

In order to help cope with these challenges, I had a reference committee of about half-a-dozen people in Darwin. On it were people familiar with Aboriginal culture, historians, a librarian from the Northern Territory Parliamentary Library, and the General Secretary of the Northern Synod. They were able to advise me on various matters, save me from some mistakes, and read and comment on drafts of chapters in the book.

On a more positive note, I was most fortunate that the Mitchell Library in Sydney, the Northern Territory Archives in Darwin, and to a lesser extent, IATSIS in Canberra and the Berndt Museum in Perth, have exceptionally good records of Methodist activities on Goulburn Island up until the late 1970s.

In addition to archival sources, there were missionaries and missionary families around who were amazingly generous in giving me interviews, photos, diaries, letters, reports, information and books. While researching the history I was also pleasantly surprised to discover many excellent photographers among Methodist missionaries. Through their efforts Warruwi is blessed with a splendid pictorial history.

Process

It took a while to decide on how I might structure the book. There are eight chapters in the history. The first locates the island in nineteenth-century colonial history and in the web of international commerce. It picks up the expression 'down Goulburn Island way' which first entered common vocabulary in the last quarter of the

nineteenth century, but we know that much earlier the Goulburn Islands lay on the route to important trepang sites scattered along the northern Australian coastline—from the Coburg Peninsula in the west to the bottom of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the east. From the last quarter of the eighteenth century the Goulburn Islands were more or less the geographical centre of a thriving trepang industry, known to the Macassans, and identified on their charts, as 'Marege'.

The Goulburn Islands entered into European consciousness in 1818 when they were first surveyed and named by Captain Phillip Parker King after Henry Goulburn, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time. King visited the Goulburn Islands three times from 1818 to 1820. His precise measurements of the latitude and longitude at Bottle Rock just off the west coast of Goulburn Island, literally put Goulburn Island on the map for the first time, making it possible for all subsequent navigators, traders and adventurers to know exactly where Goulburn Island was.

Accompanying King was the botanist Allan Cunningham who was the first to explore the rich botanical diversity of the Goulburn Islands. He took the extraordinary step of sowing a large quantity of peach and apricot stones, lemon seeds, peas, beans, carrots, parsley, celery, parsnips, cabbage, lettuce as well as a variety of flowers including the weed, Spanish broom. It is unlikely that any of these seeds survived. Nevertheless Cunningham sowed thoughts in the minds of future intruders into Arnhem Land of the possible economic potential of the Goulburn Islands.

By the time James Watson and his missionary colleagues arrived in 1916, the inhabitants of South Goulburn Island were familiar with outsiders and the expression 'down Goulburn Island way' came to mark the eastern limit of a 'friendly' and safe area surrounding Darwin. (Further east the inhabitants were considered wild and dangerous.)

In the second chapter I look at the theology underlying the Methodist Church's decision to start a mission in Arnhem Land. I argue that James Watson represented the beginnings of a new wave of thinking in Methodism—one of making reparation or doing atonement for the diseases and destruction inflicted on Indigenous societies by European civilisation.

Mission as atonement was not an entirely new idea. A tradition of understanding mission in terms of atonement for the iniquities of the slave trade can be dated from the end of the eighteenth century with people like William Wilberforce. In the early twentieth century, Albert Schweitzer also epitomised atonement thinking. In 1913 he gave up a career of great academic distinction to devote himself to the care of the sick in Africa. In his widely-read reminiscences *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, Schweitzer gives his reasons for this decision:

> We are not free to confer benefits on these men, or not, as we please; it is our duty. Anything we give them is not benevolence but atonement. For everyone who scattered injury someone ought to go out to take help, and when we have done all that is in our power, we shall not have atoned for the thousandth part of our guilt.

Strong elements of atonement thinking are also evident in Methodism's decision to establish an Aboriginal mission in northern Australia. It is most clearly expressed in Joseph Bowes' chapter, "The Australian Aborigine" in *A Century in the Pacific* (1914), a centenary volume celebrating Methodism's extraordinary missionary successes in the Pacific:

> A missionary Church … will not atone for this inexcusable neglect [of Aboriginal people], save by seizing the opportunities now offering, and taking up the work on approved modern lines. Many hearts have been troubled over this neglect during the past few years.

The other six chapters are structured around the four major activities of Methodist missionary work. These are broadly classified as industrial (i.e., agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, arts and crafts, etc.), educational, medical and spiritual. Actually, a reader of *Fighting Spirit* may find it something of a surprise to discover the huge amount of time and effort that Methodist missionaries spent on the so-called 'industrial' activities in a religious history, yet not to include it would give an incomplete or impoverished picture of their holistic approach to mission. (It is interesting to note that Congress often criticises Missions and missionaries for being 'spiritual' rather than 'holistic' but the evidence shows that this was not the case for Methodist missions.) Without a shadow of doubt the medical and educational activities of Methodist missions were for the people. Even the 'industrial' activities of the mission were an attempt to generate income so that the community might become economically self-reliant in a rapidly changing world

while retaining, as far as possible, their own distinctive culture and identity.

Learnings

Let me conclude with three learnings from the history. First, I was struck by the slow uptake of language study by Methodist missionaries. It wasn't until the late 1950s when one of the nurses on Goulburn Island was set aside for language work that there was any real progress made in Bible translation. Most Methodist missionaries in Arnhem Land spent so much time and energy on income-producing industries that they had simply no time for language study—what many of them considered the 'real work' of mission.

The second thing that I found curious about Methodist missions in Arnhem Land was their fascination with islands. Initially, Watson may have had very good reasons for establishing a mission station on an island; Methodism, after all, had been very successful in the nineteenth century working on islands in the Pacific and Watson, himself, had previously been a missionary on a small island off the coast of New Guinea. Islands also offered some protection against destructive, outside influences. Watson, however, was obsessed with islands and sought to create a string of island missions right along the northern coast of Arnhem Land. Unfortunately, this insular ideology meant that Methodists were slow to pick up opportunities when they offered themselves on the mainland.

Thirdly, and most importantly, I reached the conclusion that Methodist missions in Arnhem Land were reasonably successful. After their disastrous efforts among

Indigenous people in the nineteenth century, Methodist missionaries with their new theology of atonement or at-one-ment, seemed to have learnt some lessons and were less inclined to repeat the 'sins' of colonialism of an earlier era. If you measure success in terms of the esteem in which James Watson and the missionaries who went to Goulburn Island are still held by the people there, then Methodist missions in the first half of the twentieth century could be said to be successful. And if you measure success in terms that there are thriving communities today where once there were Methodist missions, then again you could say that Methodist missionaries did a pretty good job.

Title

Finally, a word about the title, *Fighting Spirit*. The title stems from two sources. The first is the message that Captain Philip Parker King left in a bottle in 1818 at Bottle Rock. We don't know the exact wording of the message but we do know that he described the people as having a "fighting spirit". This same fighting spirit is reaffirmed in a story told by Lazarus Lamilami, a Goulburn Islander and the first ordained Aboriginal Methodist minister in Australia, Lamilmai tells the story about the fighting powers of the Maung leader, Mandjurbur, and how the Goulburn islanders of his time were well-known for their fighting spirit. As the study developed I came to the conclusion that 'fighting spirit' was also a good description of the people (Indigenous Christians and missionaries) who have lived and worked on Warruwi.

It is my hope that the book will help a new generation of people on Warruwi to know their history better and to

rediscover that "fighting spirit" that lies at the heart of their history, their community and their church.

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A SMALL, PRECIOUS AND FRAGILE OBJECT OF GOD'S GRACE: THE UNITING CHURCH AFTER 40 YEARS

Julia Pitman

Abstract

What is there to celebrate after 40 years of the Uniting Church in Australia? Reflection on the Uniting Church is often celebratory, antiquarian, or in narrative form. If the fortieth anniversary of the Uniting Church is to be directly relevant to the church, it deserves analytical treatment in the light of Biblical theology, history, tradition and pastoral experience. This paper argues that the Uniting Church has survived in spite of considerable external and internal threats to its life. It explores the miracle of the existence of the Uniting Church despite secularisation, apathy and atheism on the one hand, and self-destructive, delusory and marginalising tendencies on the other. The decline of the Uniting Church will not be slowed either by acquiescence to the outside world or by self-deception about the internal state of the church. If the Uniting Church is to survive into the future, it will need to continue to recover its deep theological and philosophical basis as well as heed the warnings of other, similar churches and para-church organisations that have also declined. While the Uniting Church is declining more slowly than is often predicted, if it is able to see itself as a small, precious and fragile object of God's love it may have a much longer life-expectancy than current projections.

How might we celebrate 40 years of the Uniting Church in Australia? Although the lead from the Assembly of the Uniting Church has been fairly superficial, a critical approach to church history will help us as a church to be guided into God's future. This article considers the approach of the Assembly to the anniversary as a missed opportunity with theological consequences, it raises concerns about the structural problem of the future of church history within the Uniting Church, and suggests a methodology for analysis of church history at the time of anniversaries. The article argues that in spite of being a victim of the complex problems besetting western Christianity and its own self-marginalising tendencies, the Uniting Church has survived and should respond to its fortieth anniversary by seeing itself as a small church in a multi-cultural and multi-faith nation commissioned to the task of evangelising the Australian people within the Asia-Pacific region.

The response of the Assembly of the Uniting Church to the fortieth anniversary of the church was shallow to the point of idolatry. In preparation for anniversary celebrations on 22 June, the 'celebration packs' that Uniting Church congregations received—complete with posters, balloons, and a banner to erect at the front of the church building—helped congregations to offer last-minute birthday cake or a buffet dinner, but not much more than that. Synod papers ran stories on the fortieth anniversary of the church as a 'mid-life crisis'[1]; occasionally a scholar with connection to the long process of uniting such as the Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood or the Rev. Dr

[1] For example, *Journey*, June 2017, p. 5.

Bruce Upham[1] was invited to provide a reflection. The Assembly motto 'All of this is us' with its cumbersome rhythm and attention not to God, but to humanity in all its diversity—which church members are called to transcend rather than to emphasise—reflected the lack of theological preparation: congregations were provided with milk, but not much meat (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12 NRSV).

The danger of idolatry in church anniversary celebrations arises from the structural problem of the lack of support for church history within the Uniting Church. William Emilsen has bequeathed to the Uniting Church several collections of essays on its history[2], but antiquarianism is likely to increase because of the lack of sustained institutional support within the Uniting Church for dedicated positions in theological colleges in Church History. The Uniting Church has not continued to identify and to set aside church historians to provide leadership to the denomination as a whole in order to provide historical reflection on contemporary debates within the church and society. The last church historian employed by a Uniting Church theological college who was a member and minister of the church was William Emilsen, who retired from the United Theological College, Sydney, in 2014. His position was not filled. In addition, there is a lack of preparedness within the

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[1] *Journey*, March 2017, p. 13; *Journey*, June 2017, p. 17.

[2] Emilsen, W.W., and Emilsen, S., eds, *Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia, 1977–1997,* UTC Publications, 1997; Emilsen, W.W., and Emilsen, S., eds, *The Uniting Church in Australia: The First Twenty-Five Years,* Circa, 2003; Emilsen, W., ed., *An Informed Faith: The Uniting Church in Australia at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,* Mosaic Press, 2014.

church to use its theologians and church historians in the production of resources for church use.

If the fortieth anniversary of the Uniting Church is to keep the church focussed on Christ and to be directly relevant to the church and to society more broadly, it deserves a methodology that provides analysis in the light of Biblical theology, history, tradition and pastoral experience. Ministers and scholars of the church are responsible to provide theological reflection on the life of the church beyond the celebratory. Equally, the church should invite comment from its finest leaders with the expectation of a critical element. The casual nature of the observance of the fortieth anniversary of our church, in so far as it was led by the Assembly and Synods, reflects some of the symptoms of the situation of the church after 40 years.

The Uniting Church has survived in spite of considerable external and internal threats to its life. We explore the miracle of the existence of the Uniting Church despite secularisation, apathy and atheism on the one hand, and self-destructive, delusory and self-marginalising tendencies on the other.

The Uniting Church in Australia as a union church within a settler society, suffers many of the same challenges of Christianity in Western societies. The church in the Western world is in serious trouble. The decline of traditional forms of community, work and leisure and their replacement by new forms have all challenged the local congregation as the main place for community and identity formation. The introduction of Sunday work, sport and trading has meant that for most serious Christian families regular church involvement requires often

impossible sacrifices; the private school receives support while the local congregation has become part of the meaningful leisure activities of the retired. The changing nature of work in the rural sector has shrunk local populations and significantly affected the capacity of congregations to attract and retain ministers significantly; the rural church has declined to at most one-third of the size it was at union and the majority of congregations are now led by lay people. The drop in the quality of reporting in the mainstream media has been reflected in the church press. The decline of traditional forms of neighbourliness and the welfare state has meant that more people are seeking assistance from the church with more complex health, education, and housing problems at a time when local congregations have fewer resources than ever to help them. Church members, who are often professionals and community leaders and who accommodate themselves well to Western culture, acquiesce in the decline of the church by accepting other engagements on Sundays and attending worship less frequently; a minority of Elders are active in systematic pastoral visitation. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is an extremely marginalised part of the community whose systems of meaning have been almost completely destroyed. The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, formed in 1985, provides a forum for discussion, ministry and leadership development, but cultural differences and the internalisation of marginalisation by leaders makes genuine sharing of responsibility for all aspects of church life extremely difficult, especially in technical areas such as financial management or the theological relationship between gospel and culture. In Australia, as in other

Western nations, secular ideas flourish, but fail to satisfy, and the number of atheists increases gradually.

The Uniting Church, as a victim of this process of secularisation, is not in a strong position to meet the challenge of it. There is now a serious crisis of membership. At less than one hundred thousand, the number of members is simply not sufficient to pass on the Christian faith to the next generation whose parents struggle to make the Christian faith a priority of their lives. The Christian schools, which encourage the baptism of children for enrolment, may provide a partial sense of Christian community for a time, but not for a life-time. Work practices mean that the churches may cater only for those workers who are employed in 9 am–5 pm Monday–Friday jobs; shift workers, especially in the areas of mining, construction, health and hospitality, are not likely to be able to attend church services held at weekends. Resources for baptism are now hopelessly out-of-date. The catechumenate, which follows the early-church practice of induction over a three year period, is probably too long for today's adult candidates; on the other hand, spontaneous baptism in large-church environments is not likely to yield much sense of ongoing involvement in church life as members. The migrant churches that have joined the Uniting Church in Australia are but a fraction of those congregations from Asia and the Pacific that continue to relate to the parent church in the homeland.

The shortage of members in turn affects the development of leaders. Lay leaders with youth and enthusiasm are few and ministers are not likely to encourage their best lay leaders to become candidates for the ministry.

The five theological colleges have insufficient candidates for ordination to meet the need and not enough students to be viable as stand-alone institutions. There are no longer enough Uniting Church ministers with academic qualifications to serve in the theological colleges as theological teachers with the kind of personal and academic standing that would attract the respect and admiration of students in the way that scholars such as Davis McCaughey or George Yule did in a previous age. The appointment of lay people and ministers from other denominations to teaching positions in the theological colleges reflects lack of self-respect as a denomination and lack of serious consideration for the training of ministers of a Reformed and Evangelical Church. In terms of the conditions for the ministry today, the easy access of lay people into pastorates makes a mockery of the long-term training of ministers. In addition, the profiles of congregations are frequently misleading or unrevealing of the truth of a prospective pastorate. Nothing can prepare a minister for the overwhelming shock of appointment to successive pastorates that have been assessed by presbytery ministers as financially viable and yet are not actually. The notion that a pastorate is likely to become viable within a few years if a minister is called to it is hardly an honest basis for calling a minister.

The rhetoric and behaviour of Uniting Church leaders can be, at worst, self-destructive, delusory and self-marginalising. The critique made of the *Basis of Union* by conservative Presbyterians in church union debates in relation to matters such as the role of presbyteries being not strong enough to withstand centralising tendencies

has, in practice, been borne out[1]. Since 1977 there have been no further organic unions in Australia. The charism of the Uniting Church, of Christian unity, has been sacrificed at the altar of avant-garde-ism[2]. The mishandling of the sexuality debate has led to further decline and brought the most significant bilateral dialogues with other Christian churches, in terms of potential for organic union, (the dialogues with the Anglicans, the Lutherans and the Churches of Christ), effectively to an abrupt end.

The collapse of the presbyteries in South Australia and Western Australia has been catastrophic for morale among ministers and lay leaders who have suffered a serious lack of pastoral care and for whom there has been little separation between presbytery and synod functions. The review of Assembly structures from 1997 involved the reduction of the commissions to reference committees without election at Assembly, which permanently impaired the capacity of the national church to attract and retain the support of high-quality volunteer labour. The tendency to appoint lay people rather than ministers to important roles in presbyteries, synods and

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[1] *The Other Side: A Critical Discussion of the Joint Commission's proposed Basis of Union for the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches,* Presbyterian Church of Australia,1964; Owen, Michael, *Property and Progress for a Pilgrim People: How much has the Uniting Church now lost the way?* Morning Star Publishing, 2017.

[2] See James Haire, "United and Uniting Churches" in G. Wainwright and P. McPartlan, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies* in Oxford Handbooks online 2017. http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600847.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199600847-e-30?rskey=hmXVNQ&result=1 accessed 16 October 2017.

the Assembly has led to a lack of theological leadership. The shift, for example, over time in the appointment of leaders of synod papers from ministers to lay journalists may have led to better technical proficiency, but has meant less breadth of vision for stories and less detail in reporting than in the journals of the three previous denominations. Whereas once the activities of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia were regular features of the denominational press—a reflection of a requirement of the *Basis of Union* to maintain contact with the world church—now the names of these bodies are left virtually unknown.

Those seeking to lead the Uniting Church often fail to develop a distinctively denominational theological perspective in favour of extremes from the left and the right of Christianity. On the one hand, liberal-progressive theology leads to Unitarianism, decline and certain death such as occurred to most of the Presbyterians in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, or the Student Christian Movement in the late twentieth century. On the other hand, pan-pentecostalism leads to depression. The advertising, for example, of leadership conferences featuring keynote speakers from American mega-churches are scarcely relevant theologically and sociologically to a church that was inspired by the theology of Karl Barth and is increasingly small-scale, rural and led by lay people.

The decline of the Uniting Church will not be helped either by acquiescence to the outside world or by self-deception about the state of the church within. If the Uniting Church is to survive into the future, it will need to continue to recover its deep theological and

philosophical basis as well as heed the warnings of other, similar churches and para-church organisations that have also declined. If the church is to respond positively to current and future conditions, it will require a complete change in outlook. While the Uniting Church is declining more slowly than is often predicted, if it is able to see itself as a small, precious and fragile object of God's love it may have a longer life-expectancy than current projections. Concrete actions that must be seriously considered now include the following.

1. A plan for the evangelisation of the Australian people that includes a new approach to baptism and church membership.

2. A national consultation process on theological education with a view to reducing the capital city-based theological colleges to one or two for the training of ministers (in Sydney or Melbourne—continue Nungalinya in Darwin) with the expectation of a three-year full-time theological course delivered by experienced Uniting Church ministers with research higher degrees in theology. Lay leadership training would continue to be conducted in the capital cities and regions by suitably-qualified synod staff and ministers.

3. An approach to continuing education and leadership development of ministers and lay people that reflects the ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia through invitation to scholars from equivalent networks such as the Gospel and Our Culture Network inspired by Lesslie Newbigin.

If a church anniversary is to be relevant to the church and the world then it must be observed at some depth

in order for the church to avoid idolatry and to remain focussed on Jesus Christ. A critical appreciation of church history will have implications for the formation of policy and future directions for the church as a whole. If the observers of the fortieth anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia are to do so with real meaning, they must engage in a realistic and in-depth appraisal of the past in order to make wise decisions for the future. The Uniting Church in Australia, set in the context of a settler society in Western culture, is enduring difficult times. However, there is no excuse for squandering the inheritance of the past and taking our gaze off Jesus Christ. The warnings of the prophets of doom can be heeded and the grace of God may be received.

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SURROUNDED BY A GREAT CROWD OF WITNESSES

Leanne Davis

Abstract

Playford Uniting Church, in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, is one of the newer congregations of the Uniting Church in South Australia. A new congregation, in a new building, doesn't just spring up out of nowhere. There is a long history of spirituality, faith and worship amongst the communities of the northern Adelaide Plains, and it is this history—that of the 'great cloud of witnesses'—that has become part of the history and 'DNA' of Playford Uniting Church.

This paper briefly explores the history, the life, the faith and the witness of these communities.

Welcome to Playford Uniting Church

We are still a fairly new congregation in the outer northern suburbs. This is one of the fastest growing areas in South Australia, if not Australia. Our property is one of the new 'greenfields' developments in the City Council area. Only a few years ago the area was all wheat and barley paddocks. That same space is now becoming a community with houses, shops, schools and a church.

We have built, and are building, a beautiful space, but the building is only part of the story. As a congregation we know that the building is not the church, but to the community around us, the building makes a strong statement about who we are, and what we are about. The Playford UC vision is: "A people awakened by the Spirit, moving in our communities, cultivating hope and transforming futures".

We have been living in our building since July 2015 and as we see it and use it, it's not just a building for the Playford Uniting Church but a community space for the northern communities. Our vision is that this will be a focus for people to encounter God. It is a very visible presence in the community.

Many older buildings have foundation stones or plaques that give a date for the start or progress of the building. At Playford we have no foundation stone or plaque. What we do have are our dreams, visions and prayers always under our feet.

During the building process, and on the night before the carpet was laid, the congregation gathered. With felt tip markers in hand, they wrote these prayers, dreams and visions on the concrete floor. The children who were there drew their dreams and visions of what the church looked like on the floor.

Early Playford Uniting Church

On Sunday 4 December, a group of about 60 to 70 people gathered in the Performing Arts Centre of the St Columba School at Andrews' Farm. It had been a deliberate decision to meet in a space that wasn't an exciting building owned or occupied by one of the joining congregations. This helped to make it clear that Playford UC was a new beginning.

The first service of worship for Playford UC began with a paraphrasing of the first paragraph of the Basis of Union (with acknowledgment to the forebears of the Uniting Church). The service began that way for a number of reasons. Firstly, Playford UC didn't 'just' happen. In the preceding 12 to 18 months there were many meetings of large and small groups, with discussions ranging from 'Are we are going to do this' to 'Where are we going to do this?' and once the decision to start Playford UC had been made, the questions changed to 'How are we going to do this?' and 'Who is going to do things?' and so on.

Secondly, the coming together of the congregations for Playford was seen as being not dissimilar to the coming together of denominations in 1977. We came together, despite differences, and maybe even despite the similarities, to be new. The focus for the union of the Uniting Church was not about trying to shoehorn everyone's traditions together and trying to make it work, but making something new—coming together, honouring the past, and starting afresh. It is with the same mindset that the people of the three joining congregations (Cornerstone, Gateway, and Journey ED) came together to form Playford UC. We wanted to honour the past, and start afresh.

We came together to refresh the congregation and bring a new vitality to the work of God's kingdom in our area.

The discussions about the formation of Playford UC initially began when the developers (Renewal SA) in Munno Para (Playford Alive development) offered a significant piece of land in the development for a church. The SA Synod were the only ones to express an interest, and so talks began with the existing congregation in the Playford City Council area in 2010. A number of gatherings were held, and ultimately three congregations chose to close in order for the vision that had been shared to become reality. After some years of negotiations, the land was formally acquired by the SA Synod in April 2014. Members of the Playford Congregation gathered on the land at that time to pray and celebrate the goodness of God.

In September 2014 the congregation gathered again on the land to celebrate the beginning of the building. The

day before construction began we gathered on the land, once again, to celebrate the blessings of God and to officially 'break ground' before the builders moved in. The mayor of Playford City Council was present and invited all the children present to share the breaking of the ground with him. He announced that this new church wasn't about him; it was about the future of the community, and the children present represented this future.

By July 2015 a congregation that had felt 'homeless' since December 2011 (using a rented space, but only on Sundays) had a home, and Playford UC Congregation moved into its new space. The official opening was held in September 2015—12 months from when had broken ground on the site. We no longer felt homeless, and we were much more visible to the community around us. We were no longer hidden. In this change the congregation more than doubled in size in a short period of time.

Earlier congregations and faith communities

As already noted, the Playford UC congregation began as the coming together of three congregations—Cornerstone at Davoren Park, Gateway at Elizabeth Downs, and Journey ED at Elizabeth Downs.

Many members of those congregations are still a part of the Playford Congregation, but most of the new congregation are newer members, people who don't have the history of the former congregations and have joined the congregation since we began.

Each of the congregations forming Playford Congregation had its own history. Cornerstone was formed when a number of other parishes were being dissolved (late

1999–2000). As with the discussions for the formation of Playford Congregation, not all congregations joined. The congregations which formed Cornerstone were LYNAY[1] St Andrew's Blakeview, the All Saints congregation at Davoren Park, and the FOCUS congregation at Elizabeth Grove. Of the other congregations in the parish (see later), some members joined, while the rest of the congregations remained separate.

Gateway was formed in 1991 when the congregations at Elizabeth Downs and Elizabeth East came together to form a new congregation. The Journey ED congregation was a church plant in the Elizabeth Downs area from the Journey congregation in Golden Grove.

Elizabeth-Munno Para Parish

At the time when the idea of 'parish' was dissolved in the late 1990s, the following congregations were part of the Elizabeth-Munno Para Parish.

- All Saints at Davoren Park.
- St Stephen's at Elizabeth North.
- Elizabeth Grove at Elizabeth Vale.
- FOCUS at Elizabeth Vale (sharing a property with the Elizabeth Grove congregation).
- Gateway at Elizabeth Downs.
- One Tree Hill.
- LYNAY St Andrew's at Blakeview.

[1] LYNAY—Love Your Neighbour As Yourself.

Early Elizabeth Churches

Right from the beginning of the establishment of Elizabeth and its surrounding suburbs in the 1950s, there were plans for churches to be part of the communities. The mainstream denominations at the time were all involved, and the Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalist established the following congregations.

- Elizabeth Downs Methodist Church. This congregation became part of Gateway UC, and then part of Playford UC. The building is now privately owned and used as a clinic for speech pathology and associated practices.
- Elizabeth East Congregational Church. This congregation became part of Gateway UC. The building is now the local branch of the RSL.
- Elizabeth Grove Methodist Church. This was the first of the Methodist churches established in the area, and it is still used by the Elizabeth Grove UC congregation.
- Elizabeth North Presbyterian Church (St Stephen's). The St Stephen's congregation continued after the formation of Cornerstone, and only closed in recent years due to the ageing and dwindling congregation. The building is now the home for the Northern Suburbs Dinka Speaking Faith Community.
- Elizabeth South Presbyterian Church (Jean Flynn). This is still a Presbyterian church in Elizabeth South.

- Elizabeth West Methodist Church (All Saints – Davoren Park). When Cornerstone was formed, this became the home for Cornerstone.
- One Tree Hill. This is still the One Tree Hill UC, and still used by the congregation. It is the only church in the small town of One Tree Hill.
- Smithfield Methodist Church. This church was also known as Little Glory Methodist Church, and is now used by a Baptist congregation and known as the Little Glory Baptist Church.

As early as 1966 the congregations came together in formal co-operation between the congregations and the three denominations. In 1969 the "United Elizabeth Parish" was formed with all the congregations at the time becoming involved. It is unclear at this stage why, even though there was eager involvement from the Jean Flynn Presbyterian Church at that time, they chose to refrain from joining the UCA less than ten years later.

Before Elizabeth

Before Elizabeth was established the Gawler Plains (the area stretching between Salisbury and Gawler) was largely open plains, either farmland or open land covered in scrub.

Quite a number of small Bible Christian chapels and Primitive Methodist churches sprang up in this area. Each one was established in the little farming communities that were also being established across the plains. The places of worship became central to these communities. Many of these were outside what is now the Playford City Council area, but they still represent the

history of faith in the community of which Playford UC is part.

Many of these places no longer exist, with the exception of some stone ruins, or a small cemetery seemingly in the middle of nowhere and slowly being taken over by the bush.

The One Tree Hill and Smithfield churches were built around this time, and two of them are still used as places of worship.

Smithfield was one of the earliest settlements between Salisbury and Gawler (and between Adelaide and Gawler). It was the overnight stop on the mail coach between Adelaide and Gawler, and became an important stop on the railway line when that was built between Adelaide and Gawler. Smithfield originally had two churches—

The Smithfield Free Presbyterian Church in Augusta Square. It was opened in 1855, with earlier services being held in the Smithfield Hotel, and the local school. Services ceased in 1957, and the building was demolished in the 1970s. Augusta Square is now a park surrounded by houses.

The Little Glory Methodist Church opened as a Bible Christian Chapel in 1859 and had ceased to be a Methodist church before the UCA came into existence in 1977. It is now used by a Baptist congregation, and they have preserved the name "Little Glory" as part of their congregation name to honour the history of the place.

Our 'Cloud of Witnesses'

The inspiration for this paper came from Hebrews 12:1—"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses"—which, of course, follow from the list that Paul made of the 'heroes' of God's faithful people of the Old Testament.

Playford Uniting Church—as we are now, and as we will become into the future—is surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. These are the faithful men and women of God who have lived their lives in the area, who have worshipped, encouraged, prayed, and been the people God has called them to be. This cloud also includes those who don't necessarily know that they have been part of God's plan and working in and through this community—those who have encouraged, supported and facilitated the building of the Playford Uniting Church and continue to encourage our involvement in the wider community.

This paper honours these witnesses to faith and to God:

- The Playford Uniting Church family—past, present and future.
- The SA Synod planners, thinkers and visionaries.
- The wider Uniting Church in South Australia.
- State and local government supporters, encouragers and facilitators.
- Congregations of the Playford area.
- 'Pioneers' to Elizabeth in the 1950s.
- 'Pioneers' to the Gawler Plains—Salisbury, Smithfield, Gawler, and everywhere in between.
- The Kaurna people who have been and will always be part of the Adelaide Plains.

We don't live in the past, but we do honour and give thanks to God for those people who have led to Playford UC being as it is today, and Playford UC as it is now and those who will lead to what it will become in the future. As was said at one of the early services in the life of the Playford UC, we can't know or have confidence in what the future might bring, but we can know and have complete confidence in the God who brings it.

Having left a career in the Information Technology arena, Leanne Davis is currently studying towards a Bachelor of Theology, and has a keen interest in church, family and local history (particularly where they overlap). She is also an accredited Lay Preacher.

THE BASIS OF UNION: ITS FORMATION 1957–1971

D'Arcy Wood

In the Uniting Church we often talk about THE *Basis of Union*, but there are four extant versions of the *Basis of Union*: 1963, 1970, 1971 and 1992. And if we cast an eye beyond our shores there are dozens more. Some decades ago I stopped counting the number of united churches that were formed in the twentieth century, but I think that number probably approached 100. In some cases their union document was called a 'plan' for union.

In Australia the suggestion of church union goes back to the 1890s. This idea encompassed not only the three denominations which formed the Uniting Church, but Anglicans, Baptists and Churches of Christ as well. I do not have the documentation to nail down the detail about this.

The modern ecumenical movement is usually dated from 1910 when a large missionary conference was held in Edinburgh. The growth of ecumenism from that point was rapid, although interrupted by World War I. Soon after that disastrous war, Australian church leaders began talking about a united Protestant church. A Basis of Union was drawn up for the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches and a vote of the membership was held. The result was clearly positive in the case of the Congregationalists and Methodists but not so clear with the Presbyterians. Although a majority of Presbyterians were in favour, it was thought that the vote was not clear enough to proceed into union. A similar process in Canada resulted in the formation of the

United Church of Canada—the same three churches, but with a minority of Presbyterians staying out of the union.

In Australia it was 30 years before the idea of union was revived. Why so long a gap? A possible interpretation is that church leaders and church councils put their efforts into ecumenical relations rather than church union negotiations.

After the Great Depression and World War II ecumenism blossomed. The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948 and Australia was one of the first countries to establish a national council of churches—called by various names over the past 65 years or so. I served on the staff of the Australian Council of Churches in Sydney 1969–73. Ecumenism developed at other levels as well, with state councils in most states and local ministers' 'fraternals'.

In the 1950s the proposal for church union was revived. The churches that responded to the call were the Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians, but it is almost forgotten these days that the Anglicans and the Churches of Christ nibbled at the idea of joining the negotiations. In the end those two churches had observer status in the negotiations and made contributions to the discussions. The Joint Commission on Church Union (JCCU) had 21 members, all male, with seven from each church. This year is of course the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia, but it is worth noting that 2017 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the JCCU. The work of that Commission was serious and intensive. My father Harold Wood was convener of the Methodist representatives and his

preference was to draw up a Basis of Union quickly and put it to the vote. Most of the Methodists and some of the Congregationalists agreed with him, but most of the Presbyterians, led by Davis McCaughey, had a different view. They saw the union as an opportunity for a renewal of the whole Christian community in Australia, and therefore persuaded the Commission to embark on a re-examination of the New Testament and the early Church. My father's viewpoint highlighted mission and evangelism, but others saw his approach as 'ecclesiastical carpentry', that is, gluing together bits of the three traditions to build a new structure.

So it was, in 1958 and 1959, that the JCCU bent its efforts on a project called the 'faith of the Church', and a report with that name was published in 1959. Interest was so great that further printings took place in 1960 and 1965. Even after the inauguration of the Uniting Church there have been further printings. It is a solid document of 46 pages in small print.

There was much discussion of but little disagreement with this report. The response could perhaps be summarised as "Thanks for that, and please carry on!" The Commission did just that and worked hard on its second report which was on the ministries and governance of the proposed church. This report was larger, 92 pages, with the somewhat uninspiring title of "The Church: its nature, function and ordering".

At the end of the report was a first attempt at a Basis of Union (15 pages). I still have my father's copy, with the hand-written date of March 1963.

All 21 representatives signed the report but seven members also signed a 'reservation' of two pages, four of the signatories being Methodists and three being Presbyterians. Their 'reservation' arose from a disagreement over two of the proposals in the report, namely the introduction of "bishops-in-presbytery", and second, a Concordat (agreement) with the Church of South India, a fairly new united church which did incorporate the ministry of bishop. The elaborate argument for the introduction of a ministry of bishop was, first, on pastoral grounds, and second, to align the new church more closely with the New Testament and with a long tradition of a three-fold ministry in the history of the universal Church, i.e. bishops, priests/presbyters and deacons. The argument for the Concordat was, first, to share in mission and ministry with an Asian church, and second, to link the first bishops in the Uniting Church with bishops of the Church of South India via ordination (or consecration). The argument of the reservationists was not so much that these were bad ideas but that the appropriate time to consider bishops and the Concordat was after union and not before.

Thousands of copies of this 1963 report were printed and it was distributed throughout Australia. It is hard to imagine, in the twenty-first century, that such close attention would be paid to such a long document, but it happened in the 1960s. The period 1963 to 1968 was long enough for church synods, conferences and assemblies, some of which met annually, or just triennially, to discuss and respond to the proposals. The amount of response material was therefore very large. The overall response was quite clear on three points: the great majority wanted the JCCU to press on until union was

achieved, but most people, as well as most church bodies, were opposed to the introduction of bishops and the Concordat. Suspicion of bishops was strongest among Presbyterians, inherited from the struggles in Scotland, but many Congregationalists and Methodists were of a similar mind. It became clear over this period of nearly six years that the Uniting Church would not include either bishops or the Concordat.

But, as I say, there was enthusiasm for union itself. An example is in an article in the journal *Presbyterian Life* by a prominent Victorian Presbyterian, Rev. Rhys Miller.

He refers to "the expressed desire of our people for union", but he argues strongly against bishops and the Concordat. He hopes that the government of the new church will be "on basically Presbyterian lines", which is what did eventuate, in my view. He also proposed the name "Reforming Church of Australia", but that idea sank without trace.

Other Presbyterians were opposed to the union on any basis whatever. A well-organised leader of this group was the Victorian layman Maxwell Bradshaw. I shall return to his role shortly.

The JCCU re-convened in 1968 to draw up a revised Basis of Union. As before, Davis McCaughey took the lead in drafting. He is sometimes referred to as the 'author' of the Basis, but I think this is misleading. Every sentence that he produced was dissected by the Commission and Dr McCaughey went back to his study to make revised versions of nearly all the 18 paragraphs. After nearly two years of work the Basis of 1970 was published. I was the non-voting secretary of the Commission by this stage

and responsible for the publication process. In the new Basis lay preachers were added, the introduction of deacons was flagged but not specified, and the splendid paragraph 11 was added concerning "contact with contemporary thought". At the end of the Basis was a wise provision that church law (which we know as the Constitution and Regulations) will be "always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel" (paragraph 17).

This draft was well received, one might even say received with relief, as it represented a middle course in the whole debate about union. Although this 1970 draft was described, on the title page, as the "final revision", it was not in fact final. There were last minute requests for clarification and the JCCU agreed to re-word statements on five issues. These were, first, justification by grace alone, through faith; second, a strengthening of the authority of Scripture; third, a re-wording that makes clear that baptism and eucharist are permanent and essential in the life of the church; fourth, a slight strengthening of the statement about ministry and ordination; and fifth, a new sub-paragraph about legitimate "difference of opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith" (paragraph 14).

My personal opinion is that, while these amendments may have influenced a few more people to vote in favour of union, they did not, and could not, satisfy a group of Presbyterians who were opposed to union on any terms.

The 1971 Basis, the 'final/final', if you like, was issued and a process known as "education for union" took place, taking four years. The Basis was discussed and voted on at all levels of the three churches. Well over 90% of

Congregationalists and Methodists voted in favour but somewhere between one-quarter and one-third of Presbyterians voted against. (I have never been able to discover the exact percentage.)

Most of the opposition was in New South Wales and Queensland, but Mr Bradshaw in Victoria was a leader. He persuaded his church to issue a voting paper which required voters to say "yes" if they were opposed to union and "no" if they were in favour. After the voting was completed there was an outcry from those who intended to vote in favour of union but inadvertently voted the other way. After discussion, the whole vote was set aside and a new vote taken. The new voting paper was not much clearer than the original, but at least the voters were alerted to the necessity of reading the questions on the paper very carefully.

In 1971 the JCCU had a joint meeting with a new body called the Joint Constitution Commission whose job it was to draft the Constitution and Regulations. A few of the original Commission continued on, but most of the new Commission were lawyers and church administrators.

The union was planned to take place in 1976, but legislation had to be passed in the parliaments of all states and territories, and there were delays, so the union was postponed until 22 June 1977.

The *Basis of Union* has been a strength to the Uniting Church. It is referred to frequently in meetings across the length and breadth of the Church. Its language is the language of the 1960s and 1970s, but its content is strong and lucid. Large conferences have been held in

Sydney and Melbourne in recent years to discuss the import and use of the Basis and a number of commentaries and booklets have been published. An 'inclusive language version' was published in 1991, to encourage more people to read it, so there are in total four versions of the Basis. But it is the 1971 version which alone has continuing authority.

D'Arcy Wood, MA, BD (Hons), PhD, ARSCM, was Lecturer in Theology, Adelaide, 1974-88, National President, Uniting Church, 1991-94, and is the Author of *Building on a Solid Basis* (on the Basis of Union) and Co-author of *A Companion to Together in Song*.

THE VOICE OF METHODISM: HOW METHODISM INFLUENCED PUBLIC POLICY IN VICTORIA, 1902–1977

Ken Barelli

Abstract

According to historian Graeme Davison, the Methodist Church was "a powerful force in Australian life" and my paper looks at how Methodists were able to influence public policies between 1902–1977.

Some of Methodism's capacity to influence public policy arose from its size. In terms of nominal religious affiliation in Victoria in 1902, the Methodists came in fourth place. But, on the basis of church attendance, Methodists come first with 71% of affiliates attending church regularly.

Methodists in Victoria were innovators in their attempts to influence public policy. One example was the creation of the Department of Christian Citizenship, as it became known, in 1926. Its mission was "to secure the elimination of the Social Evils that hinder the progress of the Kingdom of God", confirmation of the importance of social policy to the church.

Another example was the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon program broadcast on ABC radio. This attracted many notable speakers, including Irving Benson, minister of Wesley Church, 1933–1968, who became what we might now call a media personality. Widely known as the presenter of the PSA and for his column in the Saturday *Herald,* which had a continuous run of 56 years, Benson was probably the best known churchman in Victoria.

This put Methodism in a remarkable position to influence public policy.

My paper examines particularly how Methodism was able, through various mechanisms, including the work of the Department of Christian Citizenship, and the persuasive power of the PSA, to influence policy formation and regulation in respect of the liquor trade.

It has been argued that Christianity is responsible for the development of 'Western' society.[1] In Australia, the recently published *Cambridge History of Australia* includes a chapter in its thematic section on 'Religion', which suggests that Christianity was a formative influence in our history too.[2] The author of this chapter, eminent historian Graeme Davison, goes further to note that "Methodism was a powerful force in Australian life" and I will explore how this powerful force was instrumental in forming social policies in Victoria. I will show how Methodist influence increased and then decreased during the twentieth century which may be instructive for the Uniting Church should it seek to be a powerful force in the twenty-first century.

This research is toward a thesis in the University of Melbourne and, while far from completed, I believe there is sufficient progress to make a contribution in respect of this subject. However, I add a caveat; it is possible that further research may change my conclusions.

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[1] Spencer, Nick, *The Evolution of the West*, SPCK, London, 2016.
[2] Bashford, Alison and Macintyre, Stuart (Eds), *The Cambridge History of Australia*, Vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2013.

In this anniversary year, we are thinking about the Union, in 1977, of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches, but my interest begins with a different church union. Following the death of John Wesley in 1791, the strong discipline he maintained among his followers weakened and they splintered as some wanted to emphasise different elements in their worship and practice.[1] In Australia the dominant Wesleyan Methodists united with the smaller groups, the Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, and others in 1902 to form the Methodist Church of Australasia.[2]

It is reasonable to argue that at the beginning of the twentieth century Methodism was the dominant Christian denomination in Victoria, as these figures show and that they were in a position of influence.[3]

Nominal Religious Affiliation in Victoria 1902[4]

Church of England	424,011
Roman Catholic	263,710
Presbyterian	191,503
Methodist	180,272

However, taking into account church attendance in Victoria in 1902[5]:

Methodist	127,723	71%
Roman Catholic	105,352	40%

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[1] Blainey, Geoffrey, *A Short History of Christianity,* Viking, Camberwell, 2001, p. 409.
[2] Breward, Ian in O'Brien & Carey (Eds), *Methodism in Australia*, p. 109.
[3] Jackson, H., *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand*. Phillips, W. in Vamplew, *Australian Historical Studies*.
[4] Victorian Year Books
[5] Jackson, H., *op. cit.*

Church of England	75,939	18%
Presbyterian	54,099	28%

Methodism was the largest active denomination.

Methodists had another trump card. The Wesley Church Pleasant Sunday Afternoon program was widely broadcast on radio and what a valuable forum to spread the Methodist message. Although it started before Irving Benson's appointment in 1926, his ability to use the medium and maintain an audience was such that it attracted Prime Ministers and other dignitaries with something to say.[1] It has been said that Benson was the best known churchman in Australia and in a unique position to influence public policy.

While all Australian Protestant churches were becoming more interested in social issues, the Methodists were more interested than others.[2] Social concern was in a direct line to Wesley. He was concerned for the spiritual well-being of his adherents and their social welfare too. It was not just the institutional Methodist church that was involved either.[3] Methodism has long had a tradition of lay involvement right back to the time of Wesley and his lay preachers which can be counted as part of the reason for Methodism's success in Victoria; this flexibility enabled it to minister effectively to an itinerant population in the nineteenth century.[4] Lay Methodists have an impressive track record in social reform but to

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[1] Ziegler, Harriet, *Church with a Mission*, Wesley Central Mission, Melbourne, 1988, p. 8.
[2] O'Brien, Glen, *Irving Benson*, in Curthoys and Emilsen, *op.cit.,* p. 209.
[3] Garden, Don, *Victoria: A History*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1984, p. 292.
[4] Gibson, William, Forsaith, Peter and Wellings, Martin, *The Ashgate Companion to World Methodism*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2013, p. 26.

discuss all these activities is beyond the space available so I have chosen temperance as a case study to demonstrate how Methodism influenced public policy in Victoria.[1]

Unlike South Australia and New South Wales, there is no history of the Methodist Church in Victoria in the twentieth century. Renate Howe and Alison Head have written about the Wesleyans in the nineteenth century and Howe's revised thesis of 1965 appears as a chapter in O'Brien and Casey's *Methodism in Australia* in 2015.[2] Irving Benson edited *A Century of Victorian Methodism* (1935) which is a miscellany of history and biography mostly focused on the early days of the church in Victoria.[3] There are numerous scholarly articles on various aspects of the church but, to date, no consolidated work. Also, there is no history of the temperance movement in Australia or Victoria except for Keith Dunstan's *Wowsers* of 1968.[4] There are a few scholarly articles and references but Dunstan's work is quoted extensively in any discussion of the temperance movement. However, and with respect, it is an incomplete study, probably created for a purpose other than scholarship.

Temperance in Victoria was predominantly a secular movement until the 1920s. Alcohol and its misuse is likely as old as humankind discovering fermentation, but

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[1] Wright, Clifford J., *Laymen are ministers*, Methodist Board of Education, Melbourne, 1961.
[2] O'Brien, Glen and Carey, Hilary M., *Methodism in Australia*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2015.
[3] Benson, Irving (Ed.), *A Century of Victorian Methodism*, Spectator Publishing, Melbourne, 1935.
[4] Dunstan, Keith, *Wowers*, Cassell Australia, North Melbourne, 1968.

heightened concern about the abuse of alcohol due to its availability and potency surfaced in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps originating in America, the formal Temperance movement was also well established in England by the 1830s and came to Australia in 1832.[1] While the movement was supported by the churches and probably many of its members were churchgoers, it had a separate life due to its fundamental difference to Christian doctrine. The teaching of the church was and is that people are saved by divine grace and, while social involvement is integral, grace is essential.[2] Temperance advocates thought otherwise; legislation and regulation was the solution, and this gradually changed into the demand for total abstinence and prohibition of the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcohol.[3] While the term 'temperance' literally meant moderation, early proponents of temperance regarding alcohol aimed for nothing short of prohibition.

There is a tendency, as demonstrated by Dunstan, to label these social reformers as wowsers, those of a puritanical outlook wanting to deny pleasure to the people. We need to remember, however, the social distress caused by alcohol abuse in the nineteenth century, and the motives of the temperance advocates, before labelling them as cranks. In Victoria the movement's leaders, for example, included a Premier of the State, James Munro, and a future Prime Minister of Australia, Alfred

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[1] Harrison, Brian, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England 1815–1872,* Faber & Faber, London, 1971.
[2] Rieger, Joerg, "Methodism" in Bowden, John (Ed.), *Christianity: The Complete Guide*, Cortisuum, London, 2005, p. 737.
[3] Merrett, D. T., *The Victorian Licensing Court 1906–1968*, Monash University, Clayton, 1978, p. 2.

Deakin, with many other parliamentarians and civic leaders in addition to churchmen.[1] The temperance movement spawned many satellite organisations and even today their names are well remembered—the Temperance and General Insurance Company, with its recognisable buildings throughout the state, the Independent Order of Rechabites (IOR) and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), to name just a few.

There are several key dates for the Temperance movement in Victoria—1906, 1916, 1920, 1956 and 1965.

In 1906 the Bent Government established the Licence Reduction Board (LRB) in response to pressure from temperance advocates. The original demand was for a local poll to deal with the excessive number of hotels, and Bent agreed that it would be held after allowing the LRB to do its work for ten years. Local Option is the process whereby an electoral division is given an opportunity to maintain, reduce the number of, or prohibit hotels in a given area. A two-thirds majority was required to make any change and there was the vexed question of compensation. The LRB reduced the number of hotels by 1,183 from 3,448 or 34%.[2] The end of the ten year period of LRB activity came during World War I, so the poll was postponed until 1920. Patriotic fervour generated by the war saw more temperance demands for prohibition as there was a considerable incidence of voluntary abstinence during the war (including the staff of the University of Melbourne). Failing the introduction of prohibition, at least a reduction in trading hours was

[1] *Alliance Record*, No. 1, October 1881 and later.
[2] Garden, Don, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

required.[1] The Lawson Government bowed to the pressure and in 1916 introduced six o'clock closing as a temporary war-time measure which, partly due to the behaviour of repatriated servicemen, lasted to 1965.[2]

The 1920 Local Option poll was both good and bad for the temperance lobby. The good was that two of the 214 districts were declared dry. It is the only instance of a Local Option poll success anywhere in Australia and even today Camberwell and Box Hill could be preferred suburbs for Methodists as they have no hotels. The bad part was that 212 did not vote for prohibition and it was decided that in future the poll would be state-wide, making the introduction of prohibition almost impossible.[3] This is where the Methodists stepped in. The secular temperance bodies, sensing that their mission was now doomed to failure, started to retreat. The Methodist Conference, however, in 1926 established what became known as the Department of Christian Citizenship (DCC) to "combat the social evils that hinder the advancement of the Kingdom".[4] It became the *de facto* spokesmen of the temperance movement. The successive directors of the DCC, the Revs George Judkins, H. Palmer Phillips, and J.W.R. Westerman became, in turn, Presidents of the Victorian Temperance Alliance (VTA) and continued the work into the 1970s.[5] The DCC kept advocating the cause at all levels, from local

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[1] *Ibid*, p. 322.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 337.
[3] Sugden, E. H. and Eggleston, F. W., *George Swinburne: A Biography*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1931, p. 190.
[4] Phillips, H. Palmer, *Fifty Years of Methodist Social Witness*, Spectator Publishing, Melbourne, (n.d. 1960?).
[5] *Clarion Call*—organ of the VTA.

communities right up to parliament until 1956, when a poll to change hotel hours was taken.

The Cain Labor Government of 1955 announced its intention to change hotel hours and abolish dry areas. The Opposition, led by Henry Bolte, said it would not do so without a referendum, and took the policy to the 1955 election. There was internal chaos within the Labor Party at this time as a result of the breakaway of those who formed the Democratic Labor Party, which contributed to the Cain Government's defeat but this did not stop Phillips claiming responsibility due to their campaign against the change in licensing arrangements.[1] The subsequent 1956 referendum, in the shadow of the Olympic Games and unanimous support of the press for change, was expected to be a formality but the VTA mounted a vigorous campaign and was delighted with the outcome that retained six o'clock closing. While the liquor industry gave its own members' failure to support the change as the reason for the lack of success, the Methodist-led temperance movement and its extensive campaign against extended trading hours iw a more likely explanation.[2]

The Bolte Government, wanting change, decided to not risk another referendum and in 1965 set up a Royal Commission to enquire into the liquor industry.[3] Westerman was the spokesperson for the VTA, which by now consisted of the seven main Protestant denominations, the

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[1] *Ibid*, May–June 1956, p. 6.
[2] *The Vigilante*, 29 March 1956.
[3] *Spectator*, 19 February 1964.

WCTU, IOR and a few other bodies.[1] He made the first submission on the intuitive argument that longer trading hours would increase consumption of alcohol. However, having attended all the Commission's hearings, he became convinced that his argument was unsustainable and that hours of trade had little to do with consumption. On a matter of principle, and having consulted the larger churches, he made a further submission to the effect that the VTA was neutral on the question[2]. Unsurprisingly, there was an uproar among the Methodists but, apart from the Salvation Army, there was a more muted reaction from the other denominations. In the light of this change of heart, the findings of the Commission were a formality and hotel hours were extended to ten o'clock in 1965[3].

Westerman was the subject of abuse within the church, particularly from Benson who had done little to assist the VTA in its submission. He labelled Westerman a "traitor to the cause".[4] Methodist policy was clear—"unswerving hostility to the liquor trade"—with a strong recommendation for abstinence for members, and this was inconsistent with Westerman's revised submission.[5] A new policy, adopted after an acrimonious debate, was

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[1] Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventists, Unitarian, Welsh, Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Society of Friends, Independent Order of Rechabites, International Order of Good Templars, Melbourne Total Abstinence Society, WCTU, YMCA, and YWCA.

[2] *Spectator*, 22 April 1964.

[3] *Spectator,* 5 May 1965.

[4] *Spectator*, 22 April 1964.

[5] *The Methodist Church and the Liquor Question*, DCC, Melbourne (n.d. 1965?)

put to the Victorian Conference that emphasised education and rehabilitation in place of a blanket opposition to liquor. However, when the matter was taken to the General Conference, the final decision-making body on Methodist policy, the new policy was adopted but the old policy was retained.[1] It was no longer clear what the Methodist attitude to temperance was to be and therefore unlikely that it could advocate for reform with conviction or authority. In essence, as Methodism relinquished its "unswerving hostility", the temperance movement in Victoria was on its last legs.

The rump of the VTA held an emergency meeting and required Westerman to resign as President. They installed the Rev. Dr A. Harold Wood, a leading Methodist Temperance advocate, in his place. Wood, aged 70, was an elder statesman of the church and subsequently made a submission to the Commission contradicting Westerman, but it was too late.[2] Later, the Victorian Conference was persuaded to provide a minister, the Rev. Brian Moxon, as Secretary of the VTA until 1977, and while he valiantly prosecuted the temperance cause, there was little interest within the church or the wider community.[3] Westerman, who turned his attention to overseas aid, was rehabilitated by being elected President of the Conference in 1966 but sidelined thereafter with little in the way of social questions being referred to his attention.[4] Perhaps now that the voice of

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[1] *Spectator*, 4 June 1969.
[2] *Spectator*, 29 July 1964.
[3] *Spectator*, 13 November 1968.
[4] Interview with the Rev. Warren Clarnette, former Editor of *Church and Nation*.

Methodism was without focus, government and the wider public no longer wanted to listen. Its ability to influence public policy had largely vanished.

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"TO HEAR ANEW": HISTORY IN A COMMUNITY OF INNOVATION

Katharine Massam

This year there are events around the world to mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's public announcement of 95 points of contention that triggered the Protestant Reformation, and this conference itself marks the fortieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church. Both the anniversaries, and the reality that in December this year we will hear the findings of the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse in Australian institutions, make this a fitting time to consider the relationship between 'church history' as a theological discipline (at least according to some theologians) on the one hand, and the 'history of religion' as a dimension of a wider cultural history (at least according to some cultural and social historians on the other). How does history relate to theology? In this paper I want to explore what it means to 'remember' in a church community, and how remembering well, that is to say, accurately and deeply, can resource renewal.

The *Basis of Union* implies the Uniting Church has a particular kind of theological memory. It shares with other Christians an awareness of historical events and traditions that would enable a memory of the future. It typically limpid prose the *Basis* pivots on this paradox of memory that empowers the present to enable the future.

As the UCA's foundational document, the *Basis* balances the heritage of the "Church throughout the ages" with, as it says in paragraph 9, "the discipline of interpreting

[that] teaching in a later age". If you were to code phrases that commit to remember by using italic and phrases that call for the future by underlining, the orienting punchlines of the first paragraph appear like this (noting the refusal of the Spirit to be categorised exclusively as one or the other):

> [The constituent churches] … declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ *the living* Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform *under his Word*; and they seek a wider unity *in the power of the Holy Spirit*.
>
> In this union these Churches commit their members to acknowledge one another in love and joy *as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ*, to hear anew *the commission of the Risen Lord* to make disciples of all nations, and daily to seek *to obey his will*.[1]

Weighing the nuances here and indeed phrase by phrase through the entire document points to the reality that, as paragraph 11 itself maintains, "contemporary thought" is important in every age in order to understand more sharply and deeply the church's own nature and mission, so that the Christian community remains ready when occasion demands to "confess the Lord" in "fresh words and deeds".[2] Coded for remembering and for the future, the conclusion of that paragraph looks like this:

> The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide *fellowship of churches* in which it will learn *to*

[1] 'The Uniting Church in Australia, Basis of Union', (1977) 1992, https://assembly.uca.org.au/basis-of-union, accessed 20 July 2017.
[2] Ibid.

> *sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God* by contact with contemporary thought. *Within that fellowship* the Uniting Church also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help *it to understand the its own nature and mission*…The Uniting Church *thanks God* for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It *prays* that it may be ready when occasion demands to *confess the Lord* in fresh words and deeds.[1]

The *Basis* is clearly then a document to provoke the question: 'What does memory have to do with the future?'. Or more prosaically but as a step to answering that question, 'What does history have to do with theology?'. Perhaps even more prosaically, we could re-cast the question as 'How does the "history of religion" (as an academic, intellectual enterprise) relate to "church history" (as part of theological exploration, as an enterprise connected to faith).'

Some years ago now, a thoughtful colleague shocked me with his definition of church history as 'theology with dates'. I didn't warm to the idea that this field is a derivative of the questions put by the systematicians or that it should be confined (as it often has been in the theological curriculum) to giving an account of the internal debates about doctrine and ecclesiastical ordering. On the other hand, it depends what we might mean by 'theology' (and what we understand by relationship

[1] Ibid.

between revelation and experience) and also what we understand by 'dates' (and how the dates relate to an exploration of the cultural context surrounding theological questions, the music and art, poverty and food habits, family and social structures of the time. As the Australian founders of the *Journal of Religious History* observed in 1960 it depends on recognising a "true home-ground" of enquiry in "the region where the history of religion mingles with the history of politics or society or culture".[1] It depends on how historians can bring to the table all the tools required to stretch the standard categories of analysis race, class, gender, emotion and more deeply inform our understanding of the dynamics of religious faith.

Rowan Williams is among the thinkers who have paid most attention to the question of church history as a theological discipline, and among the writers who is most alive to a rich understanding of context and the tools of contemporary history. His short, dense and rewarding book *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* began life as a lecture series. It has informed my teaching in the introductory survey of church history for a decade now. Williams steers a nuanced path, warning against two competing falsehoods. He reminds us firstly that the past is not simply "ourselves in fancy dress".[2] There is no place for romantic tributes or the creation of the 'theme park' of former times and places; understanding historical societies is far more tough-minded

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[1] Mansfield, Bruce, "Foreword," *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 1 (1960), 1.

[2] Williams, Rowan, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005, p.88.

endeavour. No one should assume so quickly that the historical reality is so simple.

Secondly, Williams warns us against the contrasting assumption, that the past is impossibly inaccessible and irrelevant, trapped entirely in its own foreign context, even when students encounter the disturbing realities of religious violence, mystical language, church corruption, or perhaps more simply the reality of lost sources, archival material in indecipherable handwriting and languages they cannot access, or, more dangerously, the confidence of their own new faith which does not need a history. Williams cautions an awareness that this is a reality the historical discipline navigates collectively.

Williams reminds us that there a way to handle the chasm between the present and the past, to build a bridge between contemporary questions and inscrutable sources, and tools that can be honed for this task.[1] No one should assume so quickly that this task is impossible or unnecessary. Instead, history confronts and engages us: authentic memory holds us accountable. This is an understanding of history as an integrative, formative discipline taken up in some depth by Williams, and reflected in other recent work within the discipline.

This potentially transformative dynamic of historical work, whereby scholars are, on the one hand, surprised and challenged by the past, and, on the other hand, connected to the realities they study, cuts through the two fallacies identified by Rowan Williams and opens the way for building bridges of interpretation and understanding. Williams calls this an 'analogical' under-

[1] Williams, Why Study the Past?, pp.88-94.

standing that the past is both like and unlike us;[1] the medieval historians Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys discuss it as a "reciprocity" of relationship between scholars and the people they know through the texts;[2] and it is identified by the Cistercian Michael Casey in his work on monastic formation as an "existential" method of "reading ancient texts in the light of present reality".[3]

There is no simple window through which to access an authentic view of the past, but there are lenses that reveal important vistas and false byways to be avoided. In the first misunderstanding where the past is "ourselves in fancy dress", there is the danger of a flattening presentism. In this view, a dogmatic traditionalism prevails and history is an exotic theme park where everything is transparent, comprehensible and easy to re-create; nothing like a foreign country with distinct and sometimes misleading assumptions.

Against this, Williams reminds his readers that "superficial correspondence in what is done or said [across time] should not mislead us as to the labour needed for understanding".[4] Words and gestures, images and rituals can all have vastly different meaning in one context compared to another. Williams argues that to assume the meaning of past texts and events translates easily "is to treat the texts of the past as closing off history, putting

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[1] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, pp.101-2.

[2] D'Arcens, Louise, and Juanita Feros Ruys, "Introduction" in *Maistresse of My Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, edited by Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys, 2004, pp.2, 5–6.

[3] Casey, Michael, *The Art of Winning Souls: The Pastoral Care of Novices*, Liturgical Press, 2012, p. 151.

[4] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p. 88

an end to our self-awareness as historical persons involved in unpredictable growth".[1] Instead, influenced by Michele de Certeau among others, he holds the task of the historian is to make the past "strange", and to make our own ways of being and thinking "strange" to ourselves by the careful engagement with other ways of thinking, other ways of ordering life.[2] Not being open to being surprised by the past, simply holding it to be familiar (whether that by that familiarity to be affirmed or to be dismissed), is the first fallacy.

The opposite error to approaching history as a theme park of ourselves is the view that the past is lost on the other side of an unbridgeable chasm of difference. This position holds that to approach another era outside its own terms it is inevitably to distort it irretrievably. More commonly held by those who claim the label 'progressive', this view privileges the contemporary context and discounts the possibility and also the worth of engaging with a past that is not simply strange, but "radically foreign".[3] Rather than recognising a present that has "become" out of the past, this 'misplaced certainty' disengages the contemporary world from other times so that "everything begins with us".[4] The past may be a series of unsuccessful attempts to 'be' the present (as enlightened, as educated, as healthy, as technologically adept etc.) but it certainly cannot raise questions for the present.

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[1] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p.94.
[2] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p.24.
[3] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p.89.
[4] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p.88, p.101.

In churches such as the UCA where there is a commitment to 'innovation' and a fear that the dead hand of tradition and discussion about 'dead people' will stifle fresh expressions of the Gospel it is salutary to remember this subtlety. The past matters. Williams argues that the past matters, as a matter of faith, to Christians because it is important to stand in solidarity and continuity with other believers in other times as well as in other places.[1]

> There are no hermetic seals between who I am as a Christian and the life of a believer in, say, twelfth-century Iraq—any more than between myself and a believer in twenty-first century Congo, Arkansas or Vanuatu. I do not know theologically where my debts begin and end.[2]

It is a subtle argument. It is the same subtlety that is part of the founding document of the denomination that preferred for the first ten years to think of itself as a 'movement', hoping that the founding fathers' move beyond ecumenical collaboration into a structure that subsumed denominational realities for the Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians involved, would spill out in other creative directions.

The *Basis of Union* is a bridge-building statement, full of the paradox that characterised the movement into union for the founding denominations. It suggests, as Michael Casey argues drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer, that 'tradition' is a verb, and "comes alive in the act of transmission which itself is incomplete until what is

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[1] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p.105.
[2] Williams, *Why Study the Past?*, p. 27.

being handed on is received".[1] There is also something else, about the responsibility for historians of religion to be alive to the theological nuance and implications of the material. I began with reference to remembering and forgetting in relation to the Royal Commission among other things. Massimo Faglioli's work on the history of the Second Vatican Council has called attention to the relationship between church history and the history of religion in ways that are relevant here.[2] (Like Faglioli I see 'between' as the dynamic to hope for, where there is exchange between the approaches, neither one 'within' the other nor one above or below. He argues in relation to the event of the Vatican Council for accounts that are not simply journalistic "memorialisation" but genuinely "historical" (whatever their subcategory). Accounts become historical when they also attend to what has been forgotten, either by repression or amnesia. Accounts are historical when they remind us that narratives of change and continuity always involved some forgetting, some 'dismemberment' as well as 're-membering'.

There is more to say about this significant methodological truth, but for today, let's turn our attention to the other bold statement of the Uniting Church in Australia

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[1] Casey, Michael, "Integrity in Interpretation: Listening for the Authentic Voice of St Benedict." *New Norcia Institute for Benedictine Studies* http://www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/education-and-research/benedictine-studies/2012-program.html, accessed 5 July 2017.

[2] Fagglioli, Massimoi, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, Paulist Press, 2012.

in 1977, the *Statement to the Nation*[1] Issued by the Inaugural Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia with surprisingly little fanfare, and alongside an even less heralded *Statement to the Churches*,[2] it noted first of all that "a new church has been born".[3] Significantly, it makes clear that the inauguration of the UCA is not a secular event. It does that even while it turns to address the issues of the day. It offers hope that the church will not be a casualty of secularisation.

The members of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches recorded the significance of their movement into union as a sign of reconciliation, acknowledging their gratitude for the past and pledging their continued involvement in national affairs. The *Statement* spoke of the responsibilities of people of faith to look beyond Australia, to South East Asia and the Pacific, and with a wide context in mind, affirmed a number of principles. As specifically Christian values the new church sought to uphold the dignity of each human being, integrity in public life and the proclamation of truth and justice; there was a commitment to challenge and correct injustices, acquisitiveness, greed and the inequality of rich and poor; concerned for the human rights of future generations they advocated, in 1977, "wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and

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[1] *Statement to the Nation*, Inaugural Assembly June1977, https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/introduction/item/134-statement-to-the-nation-inaugural-assembly-june-1977, accessed 5 July 2017.

[2] I am grateful to Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood, author of both Statements for discussion at the UCA 40th Anniversary Conference for discussion on these matters.

[3] *Statement to the Nation*, 1977.

enjoyment".[1] Finally, the *Statement* identified the allegiance of Christians beyond the nation, and the strength of citizenship that would be informed by a concern for all, in the self-giving love of Christ.

> Finally, we affirm that the first allegiance of Christians is to God, under whose judgment the policies and actions of all nations must pass. We realise that sometimes this allegiance may bring us into conflict with the rulers of our day. But our Uniting Church as an institution within the nation must constantly stress the universal values which must find expression in national policies if humanity is to survive.
>
> We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by a concern for the welfare of persons everywhere—the family of the one God—the God made known in Jesus of Nazareth, the one who gave his life for others.
>
> In the Spirit of his self-giving love we seek to go forward.[2]

It was a forward looking declaration from a church community that was consciously 'in' rather than 'of', or defined by, the boundaries of the state. It laid a claim suited to the attention of the historians of religion, not only those concerned with ecclesiastical dynasties and the politics of church.

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[1] *Statement to the Nation*. 1977.
[2] *Statement of the Nation*, 1977.

We cannot know what historians of religion or the church will say about the Uniting Church in Australia at the centenary of its foundation, or even if there will be such people by then to pay attention. But speaking theologically we can hope, and thinking theologically we know, that if sixty years from now believers in the Risen Christ have heard of the *Basis of Union* and the *Statement to the Nation* they will recognise in those documents, and "hear anew" perhaps, their own story of discipleship and love, both familiar and strange.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS AT CHURCH UNION

Bill Harris

Abstract

Making use of my experience as the first male to be ordained as a deacon in the Uniting Church in Australia this paper seeks to trace the following.

Pre-Union Discussion*:* The development of a ministry of deacon for men and women that emerged from discussions leading up to church union. My introduction to the debate came with participation in the first vote on church union in 1960s and contact with a Methodist General Conference committee in 1972.

Post-Union Debate: Many discussions and reports and consultations followed Church Union. I participated in many of these and was responsible for the motion which was approved at the Adelaide Assembly in 1982 which stated that "the ministry of deaconess be opened to men and women". I subsequently candidated, completed my training at Parkin Wesley College and was ordained as a 'male deaconess' in February 1988.

A Renewed Diaconate: The decision to finally create a renewed ministry of deacon for men and women did not occur until 1991. I was one of two deaconesses in the SA Synod who were recognised for the new order of deacon. This model provided for a "full and equal order of ministry" and is the only one that I am aware of that also gave deacons the right to administer the sacraments.

Deacons in the Uniting Church in Australia (DUCA): The creation of DUCA, a national body for Uniting Church deacons became the key support group for deacons and

also for the promotion of the ministry of deacon. I was an executive member of the early DUCA committees.

Participation in DIAKONIA: DIAKONIA is the world body of deacons, deaconesses and diaconal organisations. Regular World Assemblies bring members together and in 1996 DUCA partnered with the Australian Anglican deacons to host the World Assembly of Deacons in Brisbane in 2001.

Diaconal Placements: A continuing problem for deacons is obtaining placements in appropriate ministries in the life of the church and the wider community. Profiles and placements continue to give priority to Ministers of the Word and even those congregations which are willing to have a deacon as their minister rarely give priority to opportunities for diaconal ministry. There continues to be a great need for further education of ministers, church leaders and congregations in the ministry of service that can be provided by a deacon and the benefits of team ministries.

In this paper I seek to trace the development of a renewed diaconate for men and women in the Uniting Church in Australia from its origins pre-union to the present day. The paper makes use of my own experience as a layman who became aware of proposals for a diaconate for men and women in the 1960s and subsequently became the first male to candidate, complete training, and be ordained as a deacon(ess) in the UCA.

The situation in regard to a renewed diaconate at the time of union in 1977 was as follows.

> The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which women and men offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of humanity in the face of changing needs. The Uniting Church will so order its life that it remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate: in these circumstances it may decide to call them Deacons and Deaconesses, whether the service is within or beyond the life of the congregation.[1]

Deaconesses from each of the uniting denominations had been recognised and accepted in the *Basis of Union* but deacons (lay male leaders) were recognised alongside elders and leaders who had been appointed in their respective churches to exercise spiritual oversight and leadership in the congregation. "Such members will be called Elders or Leaders".[2]

Thus it was that the possibility for men to exercise the ministry of deacon remained part of the 'unfinished business' of the Uniting Church when it was established 40 years ago.

Pre-Union Discussions

In 1963 the Joint Commission on Church Union presented its second report , *The Church, Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, to the Congregational, Methodist and

[1] *Basis of Union*, 1971, paragraph 14(c).
[2] *Ibid*, paragraph 14(b)

Presbyterian Churches of Australia together with a 'Proposed Basis of Union.'

The introduction to the report described it as, "the fruit of the long process by which the Commission has sought to discern God's will concerning His Church and, in particular, His present will for the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Australia". The report was presented to assist those churches in their consideration of a Basis of Union which, at that time, was subject to further revision before a vote would be taken. This report recognised that there was a basis in the New Testament for a ministry of deacon which was seen as a ministry in which "Deacons have normally been those designated for the exercise of the Church's ministry of service to the world".

Church union was seen as providing an opportunity for a creative re-interpretation and broadening of this valuable form of ministry so that members of the laity (laymen and women) could be *ordained* to the office of deacon.

This was not to be seen as a separate order of ministry but rather "a limited but genuine participation in the one order of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments". Deacons were to be ordained by "the Bishop" and would include Elders of the Presbyterian Church, accredited Local Preachers in the Methodist Church, Deacons in the Congregational Church, and Deaconesses in the Uniting Churches at the time of union. All would be ordained "for life".

The Proposed *Basis of Union* reflected these recommendations but in 1965 when it came to a vote the

recommendations on deacons along with those for the appointment of bishops and a concordat with the Church of South India were all rejected.

In the years which followed discussions on a diaconate continued in each of the denominations but my experience is limited to those which occurred in the Methodist Church and post-union in the UCA.

In 1966 difficulties associated with the establishment of an Order of Deacons were cited as:

> (a) the whole concept of the Order of Deacons is under review in the church at large and there is no unanimity among the Churches as to its nature and purpose";
>
> (b) the Proposed Basis of Union proposes an order of deacons which has not yet been finalised or accepted by the churches but which differs considerably from the Order suggested by the NSW Conference; and
>
> (c) the wide variety of services suggested for such an Order raises many practical problems.[1]

Despite noting these difficulties the report did affirm the need for the suggested Order of Deacons in the life and mission of the church and expressed the belief that the problems cited were largely "practical" and could be overcome by "careful investigation and adequate organisation".

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[1] "Minutes 1966" is the only detail on the copy I have, but I presume they are the minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Church. Personal papers of William Harris.

In the Methodist Church the recommendations from the Joint Commission on Church Union were referred back to their Faith and Order Commission with the request that they make any further recommendations to the next General Conference.

It was in October 1972, while working as a Parish Group Worker in the Marion United Parish in South Australia, that I became aware that the Methodist General Conference had given "approval in principle" to the establishment of an "Order of Deacons" and that a committee had been established in Queensland to pursue the establishment of a ministry of deacon for men and women. It was to this committee that I sent an enquiry seeking advice on when such an Order might become a reality as the ministry described seemed to fit the ministry to which I felt called.

The chairman of the committee responded to my enquiry in a letter advising me that they were seeking expressions of opinion from committees in other states and that although responses had been slow in coming he would present my letter to his committee and felt sure it would encourage them to reach finality as soon as possible. In closing he expressed the hope that this would be prior to the end of my present appointment at the end of 1973.

From 1972 to 1977 the inconclusive discussions which followed in the period leading up to church union in June 1977 are reflected in paragraph 14 of the *Basis of Union* which became the foundation document for the UCA following its acceptance by the majority of members of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Australia. For those seeking a renewed

diaconate the only encouragement to be found was "that the Uniting Church will so order its life that it remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate".[1]

Post-Union Debate

By 1977 when the inauguration of the UCA occurred my call to ministry had taken me to the Northern Synod where I had accepted an appointment as a Community Advisor with their Aboriginal Advisory Development Service (AADS)

Their Board of Education for Ministry (BEM) recognised the potential for this new ministry for their work with communities in Arnhem Land and other communities in Central Australia where they also had responsibility for the training of ministers. The BEM also sought comments from ministers and laypeople in the Northern Synod.

Discussions on the proposed diaconate also occurred in all synods and the Assembly Commission on Doctrine presented a report to the second Assembly in June 1979. In their report they noted that it was the result of numerous meetings with various groups including the Doctrine and Liturgy Committee of the Synod of Victoria. Their report also resulted from wide ranging discussion on the diaconate with synods, presbyteries, parishes and individuals.

Their conclusion was, "As a result of our study we have come to the conclusion that the Church is justified in

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[1] *Basis of Union*, paragraph 14(c).

distinguishing the diaconal service by a special ministry".[1] As the result of discussions the 1979 Assembly declared its intention to renew the Ministry of the Diaconate in the terms provided in Section 14(c) of the *Basis of Union* and referred the statement on the diaconate to synods, presbyteries and parishes for comment and report by December 31, 1980.[2]

A report on the decision in the *Central Times* of 7 June 1979 sought to clarify the difference between the two ordained ministries which would be created in the Uniting Church and recognised that "in practice the line between the two ministries will be blurred and the duties of both ordained ministries will overlap".

A third resolution from the 1979 Assembly directed the Standing Committee, "advised by the Commission on Doctrine and the Ministerial Education Council, to prepare regulations to inaugurate the diaconate for presentation to the 1982 Assembly".[3]

However, at the Assembly in 1982, the Commission on Doctrine, on the basis of the submissions they had received, presented a Supplementary Report on the Diaconate which outlined the responses received from five synods, 27 presbyteries, 20 parishes and nine papers or submissions from individuals.

As a result they had also advised the Standing Committee that "it would be premature to prepare regulations for a diaconate because the 1982 Assembly would

[1] Minutes of the Second Assembly, p. 69
[2] Minutes of the Second Assembly, 79:22 (3).
[3] *Ibid*, 79:22 (3) (c).

probably decline to inaugurate a diaconate and would seek further debate on the issue".

This was a bitter blow to those who had been encouraged by the decisions of the 1979 Assembly and were eagerly awaiting the inauguration of a renewed diaconate. Although it never got into the report, the Northern Synod and its Board of Education for Ministry was in full support of the proposal for a renewed diaconate.

Only belatedly did the Northern Synod and its BEM realise that their support for a renewed diaconate had not been recorded in the Supplementary Report and that a notice of motion which had been approved by both their BEM and their Standing Committee for consideration at the 1982 Assembly had not been forwarded to the Assembly Secretary.

That notice of motion read "to commend to the Assembly that, in the event that the third Assembly fails to adopt the regulations to inaugurate a renewed diaconate for men and women that the existing Deaconess Order be opened to men and women".

This then was the proposal that was finally presented to the 1982 Assembly following the presentation of the Doctrine Commission's Report. It was a proposal that was strongly supported by the Deaconess Order in Victoria and was presented by myself, Pastor Bill Harris, a Lay Pastor in Tennant Creek and a Northern Synod representative at the Assembly. It was presented in a paper with the title "A Decade of Debate – The Diaconate, Are We Serious?"

It was a member of the Legal Reference Committee who, after the resolution was passed, alerted the President to

the need for a change in the constitution if men were to be called deacons and advised that in the meantime they would have to be known as 'Male Deaconesses.'

To the best of my knowledge there were only two men ordained as deaconesses prior to the 1991 decision to create the renewed diaconate for men and women. One, the Rev. David Webster, an ordained Minister of the Word transferred to the Ministry of Deaconess and May 1992 was later appointed to a 'Ministry in the Market-place' in the Chadstone Central and Box Hill Shopping precinct. In 1984, I candidated in the Northern Synod for the ministry of deacon, and moved to Adelaide to complete my training at Parkin Wesley College. In February 1988 I was ordained as a deaconess and appointed as a Region Mission Worker in the Adelaide North West Presbytery working in the new housing developments in the northern suburbs of Adelaide.

A Renewed Diaconate.

In the period from 1982 to 1991 discussions and comments on a renewed diaconate flowed between the Doctrine Commission, synods, presbyteries, parishes and all interested individuals. In a 1982 study document the Doctrine Commission offered four possible options.

- A diaconate to work in social justice and social welfare.
- A diaconate to complement the ministry of the Word.
- A diaconate to assist the ministry of the Word.
- To retain the status quo.

However, in its report to the Assembly in May 1985 the Commission reported that "the response to the statement for study and comment has persuaded the Commission on Doctrine that the Uniting Church must move beyond the four options set out there". The responses to the four options were summarised and found to be unacceptable. In particular there was strong opposition expressed by many deaconesses and in conclusion the Commission offered a fifth option for consideration by the Assembly.

This option had a number of key elements which eventually came to be incorporated in the final model which was accepted by the Assembly in 1991. The 1985 report summarised the theological issues which had been raised in the responses they had received and endorsed the view "that the ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacons are distinctive and that the term ordination may legitimately be applied to both".

The report also recommended that the Constitution should use the word 'deacon' to describe this ministry and saw this as an inclusive rather than a gender specific title. At the same time they also recognised that some deaconesses would prefer to continue to be known as deaconesses.

Their recommendations sought to progress the establishment of a renewed diaconate by changes to the UCA constitution, the preparation of a paper to assist this process and the establishment of a committee to bring further recommendations concerning the inauguration of the diaconate to the 1988 Assembly.

While the 1985 Assembly did resolve "to establish a renewed diaconate, to be known as the Ministry of Deacon as defined in the Doctrine Commissions Report of 1985"[1] it also directed the Standing Committee, in consultation with the Commission on Doctrine, to present a further report to the next Assembly and outlined the questions that needed to be clarified.

In carrying out this task the Standing Committee was directed to "involve representatives from the National Deaconess Fellowship, others involved in diaconal ministry, the Ministerial Education Commission, Settlements Committees and other concerned bodies" in its consideration of a proposal for a renewed diaconate.

This committee, which became known as 'the Lavender Committee'—chaired by Mr Charles Lavender, a layman from Victoria—consulted widely across synods and with as many of the interested parties as they were able to reach. It was this committee which then circulated its report with recommendations for consideration by the Fifth Assembly in Melbourne in 1988.

An article I wrote for the *New Times* of April 1988 promoting Lavender Committee's proposal carried the title, "A male deaconess? Mistaken identity – or new ministry". It highlighted the key elements of the proposal in the following terms:

- an ordained diaconate open to men and women;
- a unique ministry focussing on service as a response to the proclaimed Word of God;

[1] Minutes of the Fourth Assembly, 85:53:1.

- an equal ministry complementary to the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the laity;
- a life-long ministry which has as its focus the calling of the people of God to faithful service and the equipping of them for that service;
- a trained ministry which combines theological insights with specialist practical skills; and
- a stipended ministry which while entitled to the same benefits as the ministry of the Word may choose to work in non-stipendiary or part-stipendiary positions.

This proposal I and many others saw as offering a real hope that the Uniting Church may yet discover new dimensions of her servant role and in so doing become more effective in her witness to the love of God for all people. At the same time there were rumours circulating that others were preparing to submit a contrary report and recommendations.

The 1988 Assembly in Melbourne proved to be a significant disappointment for those who were seeking the inauguration of a renewed diaconate. The Assembly voted to "receive" the Report on the Diaconate and expressed "appreciation" to the committee, but then resolved "to recognise the work of the committee on the responsibilities and functioning of a renewed diaconate has exposed considerations that render its implementation inappropriate at this stage".[1]

[1] Minutes of the Fifth Assembly, 88:21.3

They did however take steps to move forward on the proposal and requested "further education" of the church on the ministry of deaconess, requested synods and presbyteries to "identify positions" which could be filled by a deaconess, and requested the Standing Committee to arrange for a "study" of the "changing patterns of ministry and bring a proposal on the diaconate to the 1991 Assembly".[1]

The results of discussions between 1988 and 1991 were most constructive and at the 1991 Assembly the critical decision was made when it was agreed that the constitution should be amended to recognise a "deacon as a person recognised by the Church and set apart by ordination for ministry in Christ's Church, and accredited as a deacon".[2]

Understanding of the significance of this ministry was also assisted in 1991 by the production of a new brochure on deaconesses by the Assembly Communications Officer. This emphasised the status quo which was that the Uniting Church recognised two forms of ordained ministry, the ministry of the Word and the ministry of deaconess. It went on to state, "They are best thought of as complementary ministries serving God's people and the community. A deaconess is a person, *male or female*[3], called to a ministry of loving service to others and ordained by the church for this ministry".

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[1] Minutes of the Fifth Assembly, 88:27.4–7.
[2] Minutes of the Sixth Assembly, 91:33.1(a)(i).
[3] Emphasis added.

Deacons in the Uniting Church in Australia (DUCA)

Following the decision of the 1991 Assembly all deaconesses were invited to consider if they wished to become deacons and were invited to attend an in-service training course in Melbourne where they would have the opportunity to confirm their choice of becoming a deacon or remaining a deaconess.

The first group to be recognised and ordained were twelve Victorian deaconesses who were ordained at a synod service in Wesley Church in Melbourne. A synod service which was held at the conclusion of the in-service training course. Others followed soon afterwards with Betty Matthews being accredited at Cannington Uniting Church (WA) on 15 December 1992 and Jean Stirling and myself at St Andrews, Glenelg (SA) on 21 February 1993.

Some opposition to the accreditation continued and in May 1993 the President, the Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood, declined to make a ruling on a request that had come to him from the WA Synod. In declining to rule he noted that since September 1992 "about 20 deacons" had been accredited.

DUCA was formed in February 1993 at a national gathering attended by 57 deaconesses, deacons and deacon candidates. Membership was available to all recognised deaconesses, deacons, and accepted candidates for the ministry of deacon in the UCA. Former deaconesses were also able to apply to become members.

This organisation grew out of the Deaconess Fellowship in Victoria which had been a strong supporter of

candidates for diaconal ministry and foundation members were a number of deaconesses who chose to become accredited as deacons. The initial executive committee was also based in Victoria with corresponding members from each of the other synods.

It was DUCA which provided the support that the new deacons needed and also provided a national voice for deacons. Its key objectives included the following:

- To meet nationally, as need and opportunity arises.
- To maintain a directory of deacons, deaconesses and candidates.
- To develop a prayer support network.
- To publish a newsletter twice yearly.

Other activities which strengthened the sense of belonging for members was the provision of a UCA Deacon's badge given to each candidate at his or her ordination. The badge was designed by DUCA members and became a unique identity sign for UCA deacons. At the first national gathering a banner was created by each of the participants creating a square which symbolised their understanding of diaconal ministry. This banner subsequently travelled around Australia, being displayed at ordination and accreditation services. A towel and basin, which were also depicted on the badge, were also used at all ordination and accreditation services.

In an effort to provide diaconal resources for use in education programs annual DIAKONIA UCA Occasional Papers were produced and these were placed in theological colleges and also distributed to members. The

question of appropriate in-service education opportunities for deacons and some form of intensive training with a diaconal focus for candidates was also pursued by DUCA and resulted in what became a national deacons conference combined with a compulsory two week intensive course for candidates in the final year of their studies.

Diaconal Placements

The question of suitable settlements for deacons was one that was first raised as deaconesses sought more recognition and greater opportunities for service in the life of the church. In 1990 deaconess Bev Fabb highlighted some of the problems in a paper entitled "Issues in relation to deaconess settlements in Victoria".

> There is great confusion and a general lack of understanding of diaconal ministry in the U.C.A. This is the major problem that deaconesses face in finding appropriate settlements [is that] older understandings of diaconal ministry from past traditions are widespread.

This problem was one that continued despite the efforts of the Assembly, DUCA and some synods who all produced brochures on "The New Ministry of Deacon". The information provided highlighted that the ministry of deacon was for men and women and offered examples of the variety of service ministries which a deacon could provide.

In an article published in *Ministry*: *Journal for Continuing Education* for Spring 1996, as the twentieth anniversary of the UCA approached, I drew attention to the relevance of "Servant Settlements" for "Servant Ministers"

and noted that "it seems the situation is unchanged and the settlement of deacons continues to be regarded as a problem rather than an opportunity to give further direction to the many service ministries of our church".

It seems that little has changed as we approach the fortieth anniversary of the UCA. Increasingly the settlements that are being offered to deacons are for small congregations which are having difficulty finding a Minister of the Word. The exceptions to this seem to be positions as chaplains in hospitals and aged care or as Patrol Padres with Frontier Services. Large congregations with ministry teams rarely include a deacon.

Participation in DIAKONIA

DIAKONIA is the World Federation of Deacons, Deaconesses and Diaconal Organisations, and prior to church union the Methodist and Presbyterian deaconess fellowships were members of this body and actually organised the first conference of deaconesses in the Asia Pacific area.

Post-union DUCA became the body representing deacons and deaconesses in the UCA. It was in this capacity that at the World Assembly in 1996 DUCA offered to host the next World Assembly. It was a courageous act for what was still an infant body but one which demonstrated the strength of the new deacons in the UCA.

The 2001 World Assembly of DIAKONIA was held in Brisbane and was organised by Uniting Church and Australian Anglican deacons. It was a great success, attracted over 600 participants from member bodies around the World and showcased the many ministries being undertaken by deacons in Australia. It also

generated a surplus after meeting its budget and this provided funds to support ongoing activities in the Asia Pacific Region

The Uniting Church model for the ministry of deacon was unique in that it was truly a "full and equal order" and also that it authorised deacons to administer the sacraments when it was appropriate for their ministry. This is something that no other churches have allowed and it is still a sticking point in our Australian conversations between the UCA and the Anglican Church. We both accept any exchange of ordained Ministers of the Word but Anglicans will not allow deacons to administer the sacraments.

At the 1996 World Assembly the uniqueness of the UCA model was recognised by the United Methodist Church in the USA who invited me to join their training team for 'Formation Events' that they were offering to diaconal ministers (a lay ministry), home missionaries and deaconesses. This was preparation to create an ordained ministry for men and women in their church. Over 1,000 attended those events in cities across the United States and many are now ordained deacons in the United Methodist Church.

At that 1996 Assembly I also became the first male diaconal member of the World Executive as a representative of the Asia-Pacific Region and later became President of the Asia-Pacific Region of World DIAKONIA. Our presence in the world body continues with the Rev. Deacon Sandy Boyce now serving as World President and offering significant leadership to deacons and deaconesses across the world.

In the 40 years since church union much has been achieved. Deacons in placement are to be found in all synods and new candidates continue to offer for training. Despite this the struggle for recognition continues and many in the Uniting Church have yet to understand the essential role this form of ministry can play in the life of congregations and in the mission of the church.

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See also: DIAKONIA, http://www.diakonia-world.org

The Rev. Deacon William (Bill) Harris, Dip.Min, (Adelaide College of Divinity), Certificate in Group Work, (SA Institute of Technology) was the first male to candidate and be ordained for the ministry of deacon. He was ordained as a male deaconess on 5th February 1988 and recognised as a deacon in February 1993. He worked as a Church and community Group Worker 1969-1984, Ministry of Deacon 1988- 2008. Now retired, he is still active in diaconal and community ministry in Victor Harbor SA.

WESLEY CHURCH, PERTH: FROM 'CENTRAL METHODIST MISSION' TO 'UNITING CHURCH IN THE CITY' IN FORTY YEARS

Alison Longworth

Abstract

Wesley Church, Perth, was the venue for the final Conference of the Methodist Church in Western Australia in October 1976. There was an air of nostalgia and anticipation as the Conference hoped to bring the best of its tradition into the Uniting Church. When the Wesley Congregation celebrated its anniversary that month the people were reminded that the approaching church union was a call to renewal as pilgrim people. The commercial property in the centre of Perth had recently been redeveloped and the congregation was looking forward to the arrival of the new Superintendent Minister. The vision that church union would bring renewal was put to the test at Wesley following the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia in June 1977. A change in style of ministry would see the model of Superintendent Minister develop into collegiate ministry. Additional changes meant the Wesley Mission relinquished management of its aged-care homes and Good Samaritan Industries, while further restructuring saw Wesley Mission merge into UnitingCare West. These and other changes have challenged the Wesley congregation to find new directions for its mission. In 2017 Wesley is one of three worshipping communities meeting in separate locations, forming the one congregation known as the 'Uniting Church in the City'. This paper will investigate

the many changes over the past 40 years and will search for signs of renewal.

On 24 October 2017, it will be 150 years since the laying of the foundation stone for the new Wesleyan Church on the corner of King William and Hay Streets in Perth. Having outgrown two earlier chapels, in 1867 the Wesleyans planned to build a larger church in the English Gothic style to accommodate 600 people. The central church was named Wesley Church and was regarded by Methodists as the 'Mother Church'. By 1915 the Perth Central Methodist Mission was established and provided support to people in need. From 1949 the Mission began providing aged-care at Sarah Hardey Lodge and from 1961 at Rowethorpe. Good Samaritan Industries commenced in 1958 to provide employment for people with disabilities.

Wesley Church was the venue for the final Conference of the Methodist Church in October 1976. During that Conference, the Perth Central Methodist Mission was renamed Wesley Central Mission, Perth.[1] When the Wesley Congregation celebrated its anniversary that month they were reminded that the approaching church union was a call to renewal as pilgrim people. New beginnings were already happening. The Rev. Margaret Zayan, the second Methodist woman to be ordained in Western Australia, was serving part-time as the first ordained woman to be a member of the ministry team. The commercial property in the centre of Perth had recently been

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[1] *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Western Australia Annual Conference* Methodist Church of Australasia, 1976, p. 22.

redeveloped and the congregation was looking forward to the arrival of a new Superintendent Minister. Further changes were imminent. This paper will focus on the numerous changes at Wesley Church Perth since 1977, and search for signs of the anticipated renewal.

The Rev. Jim Cain was inducted as the Superintendent Minister in February 1977. He had served as senior associate minister of Maughan Methodist Church in Adelaide before moving to the USA in 1972 where he was senior minister of a United Methodist Church in Baltimore.[1] Within weeks of his arrival in Perth, Cain learned the Interim Division of Mission of the Uniting Church Synod was planning that a Synod Aged Persons Home Board would assume responsibility for all the aged-care services of the three uniting denominations. Members of the Central Methodist Mission Homes Board recognised the need for a Synod Homes Board, but were strongly opposed to handing over responsibility of their services to the Synod body. The issue was an ongoing source of disagreement between Wesley Central Mission and the Synod Aged Persons Homes Board.[2]

Good Samaritan Industries also prompted Synod attention for in 1978 the agency reported a deficit.[3] When their financial difficulties intensified the Synod Board of Administration underwrote the financial loss and became involved in the management. By 1983, the Wesley

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[1] *Messenger,* Central Methodist Mission, Perth, November 1976, p. 1 and March 1977, p. 1.

[2] "Minutes of Management Committee", in *Wesley Church Records*, UCIC Archives, 23 January 1978.

[3] "Minutes of Management Committee", Reports to WCM Parish Council, Wesley Records, UCIC Archives, 18 October 1978.

Parish Mission relinquished full management of the agency when a new constitution established joint management by the Synod and the Wesley Parish Mission. In addition, members of the Administration Board of the Synod were appointed to the Good Samaritan Industries Board.[1]

Even with these changes, Wesley Central Mission continued to provide many services including Tranby Day Centre for homeless people. Accommodation was provided for women and rehabilitation for alcoholics while 'Do Care' operated a visitation program for people who were isolated. Marriage preparation and enrichment weekends were provided by the Rev. Owen and Mrs Caryl Roberts and lay leaders. In 1985, in line with current best practice, the word 'Welfare' was deleted from services provided by the Mission, and the caring and support services were named Wesleycare.[2] Staff time given to emergency relief was reduced so the staff could concentrate on preventative measures.

Jim Cain retired in 1987. Amid much controversy within the administration of Perth Wesley Parish Mission and the Pastoral Relations Committee, the Rev. Owen Roberts continued in placement, but not as a Superintendent Minister. From 1989 the Rev. Kenneth Chellappah moved from being Director of Wesleycare to begin a collegial ministry with Roberts. Each minister was recognised with equal standing and had

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[1] Synod of Western Australia, Uniting Church in Australia, *Reports and Proceedings of the Seventh Synod,* 1983, pp. 52–53.
[2] *Reports and Proceedings of the Ninth Synod,* 1985, pp. 232–235.

responsibility for different aspects of the Mission.[1] This arrangement continued with subsequent ministers.

Meanwhile, an extensive review of the Synod Aged Persons Homes Board resulted in the Board being renamed as the Uniting Church Homes Board in November 1989.[2] Members of the restructured board were now appointed by the Synod with no representatives appointed by Committees of Management, including the Central Methodist Mission Homes Board. The increase in government legislation, legal issues and risk management meant these changes were essential, but for the Wesley people it resulted in a separation from what had once been a vital part of their Mission. Further loss was experienced by Wesley Central Mission when it officially handed over control of Good Samaritan Industries to the Synod in 1993.[3]

In the 1990s churches around the world including Perth Wesley were struggling with issues about same-sex relationships. When members of Uniting Network marched in the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade through Northbridge in October 1997, displaying the Uniting Church logo, some members from Wesley Church were outraged and many people transferred to other congregations. The debate and loss of members was distressing, but the outcome saw the emergence of a

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[1] *Mission Horizons*, Wesley Central Mission, Perth, March 1990, p. 2

[2] *Reports and Proceedings of the Fourteenth Synod*, 1990, pp. 189–192.

[3] *Reports and Proceedings of the Seventeenth Synod*, 1993, p. 76.

stronger and more inclusive church emerge that has continued to the present time.[1]

New liturgical understanding in the Uniting Church led to changes within the sanctuary area. In 1998 a new communion table was donated by the Huang Family and placed at the centre of the worship area. This enabled the liturgy to be fully visible and closer to the people. A central aisle, rearranged seating, use of modern media and the creation of a foyer area for fellowship and refreshments have all been introduced over time.

In 2001, 24 years after the inauguration of the Uniting Church, Perth Wesley Mission, Trinity Church and St Andrews/Ross Memorial Churches, agreed to form an Interim Joint Council. They would be known as the Uniting Church in the City.[2] Wesley Mission entered into the Uniting Church in the City as the strongest of the city churches with 50 full-time and 21 part-time staff, plus 410 volunteers.

As this arrangement was evolving, moves were underway to merge the various caring agencies within the Western Australian Synod. At Wesley Mission, as with other agencies, there was anxiety about losing their heritage and their name, and also concern that the values of the Uniting Church would be lost within a large organisation.[3] The Synod office were sharing the office space

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[1] Geoff Blyth, 30 January 2017—personal communication to Alison Longworth.

2 *Reports and Proceedings of Synod*, 2001, Wesley Mission Perth, C.17, pp. 1–3.

[3] Beresford, Marilyn, *Uniting the Mission: the story of the merger and creation of UnitingCare West*, UnitingCare West, Perth, 2011, p. 69.

within the Wesley Centre at that time and this added to the stress of those negotiations.

Faced with further changes, Wesley Mission looked for wisdom and hope as they celebrated the 175th anniversary of Methodism in Western Australia in 2005, and remembered their history. During that year a plaque was installed recognising the Nyungar people, and another acknowledged the Chinese Mission and Sunday School. Two new windows honoured past musicians. When UnitingCare West was launched in July 2006, Wesley Mission Perth was among the eight agencies within the Western Australian Synod involved in the merger. Significant financial support was provided by Wesley Mission Perth and Trinity Outreach Services.[1]

Since handing their mission activities to UnitingCare West the quest for renewal has focused on the location of Wesley Church within the heart of the city. The emphasis on music at Wesley with its pipe organ and choir has continued to draw people. Music scholarships were introduced in 2007 and their music enhances Sunday worship while regular Friday lunch-hour concerts attract workers from the city and people from the suburbs into the sanctuary.

From 2008, the Uniting Church in the City Church Council agreed no new mission activities would be initiated unless members were involved. They would not rely solely on paid staff as had been the historical pattern.[2] The 'Stations of the Cross' Art Exhibition was held for the first time in 2009 and has become an annual event,

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[1] *Western Impact*, July 2006, p. 6.
[2] *The Grape Vine*, September 2008, p. 3.

opening the church to the people who live, work and visit the city and enriching Easter worship. As well as the skill of the artists and curator, the success of the exhibition depends on the efforts of many volunteers from the church community.

The central location in the heart of the city has resulted in Wesley Church being used as a venue for many Uniting Church, ecumenical and interfaith functions, while various gatherings and vigils have been held outside the church in response to current issues such as the plight of refugees. Wesley Uniting Church was one of 13 churches in Western Australia that offered sanctuary to asylum seekers facing deportation in 2016, picking up the Christian tradition of churches offering protection to the vulnerable.[1] Support is given to asylum seekers, Aboriginal people and those with disabilities through CARAD (Centre for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees), the Boab Network and the Warehouse Cafe.

Three new initiatives reflect a growing concern for the environment.[2] The installation of a 65 cell solar array on the tallest building of the Wesley Quarter is expected to account for 5% of the energy of their largest building. Another project emerged by chance when problems of dampness in the church necessitated investigation beneath the buildings. Three 60,000 litre stormwater tanks have been installed to harvest the rainwater and will be used to flush toilets, saving thousands of litres a year. The third project is an urban beekeeping project. A small garden has been established on the roof of the

[1] *West Australian*, 14 March 2016.
[2] *Revive*, WA Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, Perth, December 2016, p. 16.

Wesley Quarter office building and two beehives placed there. Together with UnitingCare West, it is planned to develop a program called 'Level Up', helping to provide food-based employment skills to long term unemployed people, through processing the honey.[1] It was appropriate that a small jar of honey from the first harvest was available to worshippers on Pentecost Sunday, 4 June 2017.

This paper has demonstrated that forty years after the formation of the Uniting Church, Wesley Church Perth has endured through many changes. Many ministers and chaplains have ministered at Wesley, mostly male. Some team ministries worked well and others experienced difficulty. This presentation is not able to tell the complete story of the many women and men who served as faithful clergy and members or staff. In May 2017, the three ministers currently in placement in the Uniting Church in the City attended the Leaders Conference hosted by Holy Trinity Church in Brompton, London. The Rev. Craig Collas, minister at Wesley, reported that the value for him was the time spent with his colleagues building their ministry team, confirming that building successful team ministry is always a work in progress.[2] The Wesley community have let go their status as the Central Methodist Mission, but they continue to support the mission of the church financially through their considerable assets, through personal involvement in new projects and through their worship and pastoral care. My search for signs of renewal has discovered that

[1] "What's on at Uniting Church in the City", UCIC Perth, 2 June 2017.
[2] Craig Collas, 23 May 2017. Personal communication with Alison Longworth.

renewal is a continuing process. As part of the Uniting Church in the City, the people of Wesley Church Perth seek to live out their mission as pilgrim people, journeying towards a promised future.[1]

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[1] *UCIC Strategic Plan 2015–2018*, Uniting Church in the City, 2015.

WHAT WESLEY MIGHT SAY TO THE UNITING CHURCH ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 40TH BIRTHDAY

Glen O'Brien

Abstract

Voltaire's dictum that "history is just a pack of tricks we play on the dead" haunts my effort to bring John Wesley into the Uniting Church's birthday celebrations. It's a rather ill-advised thing to summon the dead out of their graves and ask for their opinion on present circumstances. It's all too easy to distort the ideas of the departed, who are not in a position to defend themselves in order to serve some agenda of our own. But this is the topic that I've chosen to take on and see where it leads. Keep in mind that this is offered in a playful and imaginative way. It is meant only to be suggestive and cannot possibly be definitive. Think of it as what Wesley *might* say to us if he were asked to give a birthday speech to the Uniting Church. I am going to suggest here four words of advice from the founder of Methodism: 1) Live on the growing edge of the human situation; 2) Offer Christ; 3) Have an optimism of grace and 4) in mission, love the church.

Live on the growing edge of the human situation

Origen, and later Augustine, seized upon the biblical image in the Exodus narrative of 'spoiling the Egyptians' (Exodus 3:19–22) as a metaphor for taking the best that

human thinking and culture have to offer and bringing it into the service of the gospel. According to Methodist ecumenist and Wesley scholar, the late Albert Cook Outler,

> This is one of the best of our Christian traditions … Christians reaching out to discern and evaluate secular wisdoms of every sort. And this is why any theology that is content to be exclusively biblicist, or traditionalist, is invalid and finally fruitless—just as, on the other side, any theology without an evangelical [he means, I think 'evangelistic'] focus will soon drown in its surrounding secular milieu".[1]

All of the great Christian thinkers have had to address the problem of the church's relationship to the wider world—"how are the treasures of human culture to be related to and appropriated by a credible Christian theology that appreciates humane wisdom wherever found—without forfeiting its own integrity?"[2] As a man of reason and religion, a "reasonable enthusiast" who brought Christ to the masses,[3] Wesley preached the gospel in ways that both benefited from and critically addressed the thought forms of his day. I think he would encourage us to do the same in our era.

But how might we attempt such a task? Firstly, we must read widely the culture we inhabit and the cultures that

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[1] Outler, Albert C., *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit,* Discipleship Resources, Nashville, 2003, p. 77.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 77.
[3] The description is drawn from the title of Rack, Henry. *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1993.

surround us. Not only theology (though that is essential) but science (both 'social' and 'hard'), politics, philosophy, and cultural studies need to be visited with an open and enquiring mind. Even such pop culture insights as may be gained from listening to popular music and a selective tuning in to the mass media, are worth the time involved. An afternoon listening to hip-hop music may provide insights into modern urban angst that a more academic work on the subject might not yield to us. Sitting through a box-set season of *Breaking Bad* may reveal as much about postmodern culture as a university lecture series.

Wesley was an eclectic thinker who borrowed from a variety of traditions and resources. He read voraciously across the breadth of Christian traditions so that his theology was somewhat pluralistic, but yet retained a remarkable consistency because it was centred upon God's saving work in Jesus Christ.[1] While he affirmed the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* he interpreted *sola* to mean 'primarily' rather than 'solely' or 'exclusively.'[2] By his own estimate he began in 1729 "not only to read but to study the Bible, as the one, the only model of pure religion".[3] From the year 1730 he first "began to be *homo unius libri* regarding none, comparatively, but the

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[1] Outler, Albert C. 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* vol. 20, no. 1, Spring 1985, p. 12.

[2] O'Brien, Glen. 'John Wesley, the Uniting Church, and the Authority of Scripture,' *Pacifica* 27 June 2014, pp. 170–83.

[3] Wesley, John. 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' in *The Works of John Wesley vol. 13 Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. Kenneth J Collins and Paul Wesley Chilcote, Abingdon, Nashville, 2013, p. 137.

Bible".[1] The word 'comparatively' is significant here as is borne out by his response to one of his preachers who claimed "but I read only the Bible," Wesley replied,

> But this is rank enthusiasm. If you need no book but the Bible you are got above St Paul. He wanted others too. 'Bring the books,' says he, 'but especially the parchments,' those wrote on parchment. 'But I have no taste for reading [books].' Contract a taste for it by use or return to your trade.[2]

Wesley's task was in some ways not greatly different from our own. He confronted the eighteenth-century challenges of Deism and Enlightenment philosophies that rejected Christian orthodoxy and argued for human independence from the divine, an argument that has only become more strident in our own time. But Wesley did not fight intellectualism with anti-intellectualism. He was in his own way an Enlightenment thinker with an insatiable curiosity for ideas and natural phenomena who highly valued reason as a good gift of God. What Wesley opposed was not the Enlightenment project as such but any version of it that left people without a sense of connection with the God of love to provide the foundation of human worth and social reform. Today we still see a great divide drawn between human self-sufficiency and God's primacy. Even our religious forms of culture are often little more than self-help philosophies with God lurking somewhere in the background as a 'life

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[1] *Ibid,* p. 145.

[2] Wesley, John. 'Minutes of Several Conversations,' in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Wesleyan Conference Office, London, 1872 [hereafter referred to as the 'Jackson edition'], vol. 8, p. 315.

coach' helping us achieve our middle class life goals. The Uniting Church should confront this trend and joyfully and confidently declare God's gracious presence in human affairs and at the same time be prophetic voices for justice. The light of God's prevenient grace can be discerned in even the darkest places. There is a "wideness to God's mercy" and an embrace that extends to every aspect of the human experience. To quote once again from Outler, "This enterprise—of living in Scripture and on the growing edge of the human situation in any given age—is a formidable, demanding task, not one for the fainthearted or the slothful".[1]

Offer Christ

In Bath on 17 July 1739, Wesley "offered Christ to about a thousand people".[2] This is one of the intimate expressions that appear here and there in Wesley's journals and underscore the nature of his approach to evangelism as a living encounter with Christ. In the Minutes of the 1744 Conference a "general method in preaching" was laid down as "(1) To invite. (2) To convince. (3) To offer Christ".[3] It is a beautiful and very personal way of speaking, suggesting that for Wesley preaching was more than just presenting a message; it was introducing a

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[1] Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 85.

[2] Wesley, John. Journal entry for 17 July 1739, in Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley vol. 19 Journals and Diaries II: 1738-1743*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenraterm Abingdon, Nashville, 2013, pp. 80–81. See the discussion of the expression in Outler, Albert C. *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Glad Tidings, 1975, pp. 45–64.

[3] Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley vol. 10 The Methodist Societies, The Minutes of Conference*, ed. Henry D. Rack, Abingdon, Nashville, 2011, p. 139.

living Person. This made Wesley pre-eminently an evangelist—a priest, a theologian, a social reformer, and the founder of a movement, yes, but essentially and most characteristically an evangelist. In the 1960s Paul Tillich defined mission as announcing to all, "You are accepted".[1] This fits well our affirming culture of self-help and personal worth and seems on the surface to be a more positive alternative to the older proclamation of sin and damnation which relied for its currency on a sense of guilt and sinfulness much less acutely felt today if at all. But will it do? We may shy away from the word 'sinner' but the fact remains that none of us lives up to our highest ideals. We try and we fail to be the people we know we ought to be. That is a universal human experience, but there is in the offering of Christ an answer to the problem of human intransigence, for in him we hear the word of acceptance and forgiveness.

I think it is clear to any observer that the Uniting Church has left behind the older message of hellfire and damnation. Even conservative churches that still confess the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment have given up preaching about it. This is quite understandable both because of the moral problems associated with the older doctrine but also because, practically speaking, the linkage between anxiety and religious guilt has been severed. I don't think your neighbours or mine sit up at night agonising over how they will fare on the Day of Judgment. People are still anxious about their existence, but do not usually exhibit the kind of profound guilt about sin that plagued our ancestors. If they feel guilty

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[1] Tillich, Paul. *The Shaking of the Foundations*, Scribners, New York, 1948, p. 162.

at all, it is not usually guilt before a holy God which bothers them, so much as guilt associated with social embarrassment or relationship breakdown of some kind or another on the human level. Neither the older hellfire imagery, nor the false comforts of the self-esteem movements of our era provide a message that is particularly good news to postmodern ears. One problem the Uniting Church faces is that in rejecting the older model of evangelism we have not found a way of replacing it with a compelling message that is good news for sinners. It is as though we have said, "We don't want to preach about 'sinners in the hands of an angry God,' so we won't do any evangelism at all". But surely, even if we have a Universalist theology, we have good news to share and should be able to call people to follow Christ as Lord.

I once worshipped in a small Uniting Church building in country Victoria, with 'Wesleyan Church' still inscribed in the brickwork. The text for the day was Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus and the strange announcement that no one would see the kingdom unless they were "born again" (John 3:3). After preaching a very rambling, ill-focused sermon, on who knows what, the minister concluded by saying, "You know, in the end, we really can't have any way of knowing what Jesus meant by being 'born again'". Of course, I understand that the text is open to a range of interpretations and that the Billy Graham approach is not the last word on the subject but surely we can say something more definitive than "We don't know what this means". That little wooden church was built by devout Methodist farmers in the 1870s. If there was any text that the Methodist preachers of that era thought they were clear on it was John 3:3! In an earlier era, Wesley's friend and fellow Methodist, George

Whitefield was once asked why he so often preached on the text, "Ye must be born again", and he replied, "Because ye must be born again".

Wesley advised his preachers that there was little to be gained by the profuse throwing about of hellfire and damnation and that they should speak first of the love of God. It was not that he didn't believe in the traditional doctrine of hell; it was just that he didn't see the point in putting it front and centre in preaching. The older Puritan model of preaching involved two steps. First, threaten your hearers with the terrors of the law. Second, bring in the gospel as the remedy. Wesley introduced an interesting variant on that approach. Speak first of the love God, then threaten them with the terrors of the law, then, finally, bring in the Gospel as the remedy. It was a small but significant change, and it brought to the masses of eighteenth-century Britain a sense of their value in the sight of God. The realisation that God loved them and Christ died for them brought to the unchurched people of British towns and villages a sense of marvel. "Could this really be true? We thought God was only interested in the church folk, not in us". They were offered Christ and they accepted the offer in droves.

For early Methodists, 'faith' did not mean intellectual assent to a set of propositions; it was an act of trust and of filial devotion. Calvin knew this also, and in the *Institutes* he makes clear that we must have not simply knowledge of God but knowledge of God's benevolence toward us.[1]

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[1] Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, John Knox Press, Westminster, 1960, vol. 1, pp. 39–43.

There was a profoundly personal and experiential nature to both Methodist and Reformed religious experience. It was not enough to know that Jesus was the Saviour; I must know that he is my Saviour; that he died for me, took away my sin and accepted me into his favour. Eighteenth-century Methodism especially was the religion of the first-person personal pronoun.[1] I used to be critical of contemporary choruses with their language of 'I, me, mine' and compare them negatively to the superior older hymns which were more objective and focused theologically on God instead of human experience. Then one day I realised that was all wrong, when I noticed all the first person, personal pronouns in Charles Wesley's hymns. Consider as one example,

> And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood? / Died he for me who caused his pain? For me who him to death pursued? / Amazing love how can it be that Christ my God shouldst die for me?

That's a lot of 'I, me, mine' language in just a single stanza. Of course it is not that there is not a qualitative difference between a Hillsong chorus and a Charles Wesley hymn. (It has been said in regard to Shakespeare that "the planet has had its writer" and it might also be said of Charles Wesley that "the planet has had its hymn writer".) You may be able to write a better hymn but you know where the bench mark is. But wherever the

[1] For a more extended discussion see O'Brien, Glen, 'Australian Methodist Religious Experience,' ch. 11 in Glen O'Brien and Hilary M. Carey, eds. *Methodism in Australia: A History*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT, 2015, pp. 167–79.

difference lies it is not in the deeply personal language of reconciliation.

'Offering Christ' and 'speaking first of the love of God' go hand in hand. Luther used to say that there was no "hidden God" behind Jesus. When we see Jesus we see God, for, in the language of the letter to the Colossians, he is "the icon of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), or in that of Hebrews 1:3, "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's being". It is not that Jesus is the friendly one who protects us by standing between us and a wrathful God but rather that in Jesus we see God's benevolence—God's saving love to all on very public and personal display. Some will accuse us of offering a watered down namby-pamby God of love and remind us also that the Scriptures speak of the wrath and judgment of God. To such an objection we can only point to the cross and see there both God's final 'no' to sin and God's final 'yes' to sinners. That the Triune God is a God of love is the most characteristic insight that the Christian doctrine of God brings and there should be no apologising for it. My more conservative Christian friends often tell me that we need to find a balance between 'truth' on the one hand and 'love' on the other. We love people but we also have to tell them the truth. Fair enough, but what if love <u>is</u> the truth? What if the truth is a person? We are convinced that the truth <u>is</u> a person, and with Wesley we prefer to 'offer Christ' than deliver definitive doctrinal statements that exclude some from God's embrace and acceptance.

Have an optimism of grace

Wesley's theology has been described as an "optimism of grace".[1] This refers both to his understanding of the scope of the atonement (Christ died for all, not just a limited number of elect) and also in terms of the extent to which believers are transformed by grace (his doctrine of 'entire sanctification' or 'Christian perfection'). Here is where the earlier reminder of the personal dimension of faith is balanced out by the universal reach of God's grace to others. Hear Charles Wesley again, this time from the hymn, "Let Earth and Heaven Agree":

> O for a trumpet voice, / On all the world to call! / To bid their hearts rejoice / In him who died for all; / For all my Lord was crucified, / For all, for all my Saviour died!

Here we see the bringing together of the personal and the universal. It is 'all the world' that must hear the call. While it was *my* Lord who was crucified, he was crucified for all. There was no doubt in Wesley's mind and there should be no doubt in the mind of any member of the Uniting Church that God's grace reaches all. No one misses out on the offer of God's grace—no race, no socio-economic grouping, no man, woman, or child. Refugees and asylum seekers are offered God's grace as much as wealthy, privileged white males like me. Gay and lesbian people are offered God's grace as much as straight people. There is a great optimism in all of this

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[1] E.G. Rupp, *Principalities and Powers*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1952, p. 90.

that reflects the core Wesleyan conviction about the universality of transforming grace.

The other area of optimism in Wesley's theology is in the extent to which believers may progress in their growth in Christlikeness. John Wesley's doctrine of 'Christian perfection' has the rather dubious status of being the most distinctive Methodist doctrine and at the same time its most sorely neglected and misunderstood.[1] The term is open to much misunderstanding and did not, in Wesley's teaching, refer to perfection in any absolute sense. His *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* went to great lengths to show that there is no state attainable in this life that delivers believers from the human frailties and imperfections that require a continued dependence on the grace of God. He wrote:

> I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes… involuntary transgressions, which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.[2]

For such reasons the Wesleyan theological tradition has usually qualified the word 'perfection' by the use of terms such as 'Christian' perfection, 'evangelical'

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[1] Much of this section is drawn from O'Brien, Glen. 'Christian Perfection in Australian Methodism,' in Winter, Sean, ed. *Immense, Unfathomed, Unconfined: Essays on the Grace of God in Honour of Norman Young*, Mosaic Press, Melbourne, 2013, pp. 234–48.

[2] Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Epworth, London, 1952, pp. 44–45.

perfection, or even 'relative' perfection. One early twentieth-century Methodist declared that he had no need for repentance since he was already made perfect in love to which the preacher replied that he should like to ask for his wife's opinion about that.

Wesley was remarkably successful at tying together 'faith alone' and holy living. He was charged with inconsistency by his critics and spent much of his life in controversial defences of his position. When advised not to use the term 'perfection,' he insisted that since it was a New Testament word he was content with it. One reason he was so misunderstood may have been because of the reliance in the Western theological tradition on the more forensic Augustinian understanding of perfection. Perfection, according to this view, can never become 'more perfect.' It can admit of no growth or extension. The idea of something perfect becoming more perfect is simply oxymoronic. However, for Wesley, it was the Eastern concept of perfection as 'always being perfected' that was in view. There can be no end to growth in perfection, as further horizons of openness to the love of God open up endlessly before us. Wesley's approach to theology was 'conjunctive,' tending to hold together themes that are often seen as opposites and to attempt a synthesis between them. It is more 'both/and' than 'either/or'—faith and works, personal *and* corporate religion, synergistic *and* unilateral grace. This created a kind of 'third alternative' that was both Catholic and Protestant at the same time. In his doctrine of Christian experience, Wesley successfully merged the Protestant concern for justification with the Catholic concern for holiness, by way of the Orthodox idea of

participation. Or perhaps all this is to say that he was simply a good Anglican.

The *Basis of Union* calls upon the Uniting Church to "listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Standard Sermons".[1] It cannot do this without coming up against his ideas about perfecting grace. Paragraph 6 of the Uniting Church's Basis of Union confesses that Christ, by the gift of the Spirit, "awakens, purifies, and advances in [us] that faith and hope in which alone [the] benefits [of new life and freedom] can be accepted".[2] This reflects a Wesleyan emphasis on transforming grace since we are not only 'awakened' and 'purified' but also 'advanced' in the Christian life. The doctrine of sanctification is not some quaint, antique Methodist hobby-horse but a major New Testament doctrine. As such it is open to a contemporary theological formulation. Those in the Wesleyan theological tradition may continue to speak of believers entering into the fullness of life in God, but they must leave behind any concept of a 'second blessing' that adds something substantive to the Christian experience that is not incipiently present in baptism. However the retention of the idea of 'subsequence' of sanctifying grace still makes sense, since sanctification must be seen as more than simply positional or forensic. The initiatory stages of Christian life, by definition, form a beginning point, rather than a culminating point in the believer's journey. In progressive sanctification there is an increasing openness to God, and to the fullness of divine grace. Such perfecting grace involves the

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[1] *The Basis of Union, 1992 Edition*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 2003, paragraph 10, pp. 9–10.
[2] *Basis of Union*, paragraph 6, p. 8.

restoration of the human person to the divine intention—full and unhindered love toward God, toward other persons, and indeed toward all creation.

Of course, Christian perfection cannot be limited to the personal sphere. The holiness of God and of the saints provides a model for contemporary political theology and its critique of entrenched power.[1] The witness of the saints to the triumph of the Lamb is a prophetic denunciation of all idolatrous systems of earthly governments making the holiness of the saints something dangerously political.[2] The church looks forward, along with all creation, to a universal cosmic renewal. The perfecting of human beings, so that by grace they become partakers of the divine nature, is but part of a broader perfecting of all creation in an eschatological renewal of the entire universe. The heirs of Australian Methodism in the Uniting Church have an opportunity to recover a doctrine of Christian perfection, informed by Wesley and by their Methodist ancestors, but open to contemporary theological discourse and fresh articulation that embodies the kind of optimism of grace that Wesley would recognise.

In mission, love the church

There is a tendency in the literature on the 'missional church' to discount the value of denominationalism and of church institutions. I think Wesley would resist this

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[1] Rogerson, J. 'What is Holiness?' in Barton, S. C., ed. *Holiness Past and Present*, T & T Clark, London and New York, 2003, p. 4.

[2] See also the discussion of Revelation as a critique of the Roman system of power in Bauckham, Richard. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1993, pp 35–39, 91–92.

and advise Uniting Church ministers to engage in mission without losing a love for the church. After all our lives have been shaped by the church, we have been nurtured in the church and, if we hold to the doctrine of providence, it is no accident that we serve in the ecclesial context in which we find ourselves. I love the story of Adam Clarke (a younger contemporary of Wesley's) who once stated that he loved all Christians whatever their denominational identity. If they loved Jesus he loved them. "But of all the churches I believe the Methodist to be the most scriptural and apostolic". His interviewer responded, "But Mr. Clarke does that not make you a bigot?" to which he replied, "No sir, for by the grace of God, I am a Methodist". I think this strikes the right note. It is possible to be genuinely ecumenical, truly to value the rich diversity of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, while at the same time being glad that we belong to one particular communion. We all must belong somewhere; we all need a context in which to serve and it is not denominational bigotry to identify with our own particular ecclesial community and to be glad for the particular charisms with which it enriches the wider church. Certainly there are things about the Uniting Church that I would dearly miss in other contexts. It is true that Paul rebuked those at Corinth who were breaking off into sects and parties declaring, "I am of Paul!" and "I am of Apollos!" But note that he also rebuked those who said "I am of Christ!" To be proud of being a 'no-label' Christian can be just as sectarian as being a bigoted Methodist, Baptist, or Lutheran.

Like the Protestant Reformers before him, Wesley had a very high view of the Church. He agreed with both Cyprian and Calvin that we cannot have God as our father

without the Church as our Mother. He had a love for the forms and worship of the Church of England, though he was consistently willing to subordinate ecclesial forms to the carrying out of his evangelistic mission. In a 1789 letter to *the Dublin Chronicle* he affirmed his deep attachment to the established church. "As a youth, I was not only a member of the Church of England, but a bigot to it, believing none but the members of it to be in a state of salvation".[1] However, he moved away from the limited view of his youth and came to embrace a more catholic spirit as well as a somewhat pragmatic approach.

> What is the end [purpose] of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God? And to build them up in his fear and love? *Order*, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth.[2]

Though he insisted, in his 1761 letter to the Rev. George Downing, "I live and die a member of the Church of England", he also affirmed, "I would observe every punctilio of order, except where the salvation of souls is at stake. There I prefer the end before the means".[3] This of course brought him into conflict with the established Church, especially its parochial system which would not allow

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[1] Wesley, John. *Works* (Jackson edition) vol. 13, pp. 268ff.

[2] Wesley, John letter to John Smith, 25 June 1746, *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 26, Letters II, 1740–1755*, ed. Frank Baker, Abingdon, Nashville , 1987, p. 206.

[3] Wesley, John letter to George Downing, 6 April 1761, *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 27, Letters III, 1756–1765*, ed. Ted A. Campbell, Abingdon, Nashville, 2015, p. 206.

itinerant evangelistic preaching to be carried out willy-nilly across parish boundaries. Perhaps the definitive statement of his view of the church's task as essentially a missionary one (and the source of the oft-heard mis-quotation '"the world is my parish") is in a letter to an unknown recipient dated 28 May 1739.

> God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish; that is, in effect, to do it at all, seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom then shall I hear? God or man? 'If it be just to obey man rather than God, judge you. A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel.'… I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to. And sure I am that his blessing attends it.[1]

He did not come to this position on the basis of temperament or personal preference. In fact when first invited by George Whitefield to preach to the crowds in the open air at Bristol he recoiled at the idea.

> I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields… having

[1] Wesley, John, journal entry 11 June 1739, *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 19, Journal and Diaries II, 1738–1743*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, Abingdon, Nashville, 1990, p. 67.

> been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious in every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in the church… [still] I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.[1]

Wesley did not enter the field of evangelism because he loved to live in the public eye. In fact, he was in some ways constitutionally unsuited to it by temperament. He always looked upon field preaching as a cross, preferring books and the comfort of scholarly retirement, but he kept it going for almost fifty years because he saw no better way of reaching the lost sheep of England.

Wesley affirmed the Protestant Reformation definition of the church that was enshrined in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (1571). "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [sic] in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance…".[2] But in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, he put a decidedly soteriological spin to this in commenting on Acts 5:10–11.

> This is the first time [the Church] is mentioned: and here is a native specimen of a New Testament Church; which is a company of [people], called by the Gospel, grafted into Christ by baptism, animated by love, united in all kinds of

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[1] Wesley, John, journal entries 31 March and 2 April 1739, *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 19,* p. 46.

[2] Bray, Gerald, ed. Documents of the English Reformation, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 296.

> fellowship, and disciplined by the death of Ananias and Sapphira.[1]

In Wesley's explanation of the origins of the Methodist system of classes and bands, given to an Anglican clergyman in 1748, he pointed out that it had "no previous design or plan at all … everything arose just as the occasion offered … following only common sense and Scripture".[2] Giving only 'general rules,' the scripture "leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind".[3] Neither Christ nor his apostles prescribed any particular form of church government and "the plea for the divine right of Episcopacy was never heard in the Primitive Church".[4]

According to Frank Baker, Wesley struggled throughout his life with two conflicting views of the Church. On the one hand, he saw it as an historic institution with ties to the apostolic age through the episcopate and, on the other hand as a fellowship of believers who would use whatever practical means lay to hand to help organise itself and fulfill its mission of reaching others with the Gospel. He had been raised in the first view, circumstances and providence led him to adopt the second, and yet the first view always remained with him, leading

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[1] Wesley, John. *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Schmul, Salem, Ohio, 1976, p. 287.
[2] Wesley, John. 'A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists' (1749), *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 9 The Methodist Societies: History, Nature and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, Abingdon, Nashville, 1989, p. 254.
[3] Wesley, John. 'A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,' p. 263.
[4] Wesley, John. *Works* (Jackson edition), vol. 12, p. 211.

to considerable problems.[1] Henry Rack maintains however that it was the second view that ultimately prevailed with Wesley using the first view only selectively in order to justify his irregular actions, stating on one occasion that he would separate before he would give up his itinerant system.[2] But could we see these two views as complementary rather than conflicting? Wesley provides a powerful model for missional engagement in which the institutional church is embraced with gratitude and joy while we engage in mission beyond its boundaries.

Conclusion

So we have summoned up John Wesley from the grave and he has given us four words of advice: Live on the growing edge of the human situation; offer Christ; have an optimism of grace, and in mission, love the church. Now he can return to enjoying his reward while we try to continue to live out his legacy in our own time. We cannot simply employ Wesley's precise methods thinking that what worked in the eighteenth century will work today. But we can be grateful for the voices our ancestors bring to the Uniting Church's present mission of "confessing the Lord in fresh words and deeds".

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[1] Baker, Frank. *John Wesley and the Church of England*, Epworth, London ,1970, pp. 137ff.
[2] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 305.

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WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM: THREE REFLECTIONS

On the Sunday evening of the June 2017 Conference, there was a double celebration held in Pilgrim Church: the birth of the Uniting Church in National History Society and the fortieth birthday of the Uniting Church in Australia. Led by the Rev. Dr William Emilsen and Dr Patricia Curthoys, the service included an address by the President of the UCA, Stuart McMillan, and three brief reflections on what the three denominational traditions, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian, may have contributed to the UCA, what important aspects of these traditions have been lost during the last 40 years and what might they still contribute to the UCA in the future. [Ed.]

Forty Years Ago: Congregationalism

Janeen Barker

Forty years ago, at the time of the founding of the UCA the Congregational Union and its adherents more or less clearly (some more and some less) understood themselves to be:

- of the Dissenting tradition and distinctly Protestant.
- generally speaking, liberal in theology and embracing of scientific enquiry.
- the proud beneficiaries of a tradition and polity which gave significance to the laity and power to the local congregation—that is, local autonomy.

- part of a church which had led the way in ordaining women (for example Winifred Kiek was ordained here in 1927, 90 years ago and to be celebrated later this year).
- involved in the work of the London Missionary Society in demonstrating a commitment to evangelism and compassionate service on a global scale—in Africa, the Pacific, China and India.
- the inheritors of a tradition which valued the leadership of not only engaging preachers but also intellectuals who engaged in some of the most pressing issues of the day. For example, in the early days of settlement, debates regarding federation, state aid, health care for the poor, workers' rights, social justice and reform were held and theologically speaking, these issues can be stated as an earnest commitment to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Progressive thinkers such as James Jefferis (the prophet of federation) come to mind—they used their intellectual prowess within the church and in public debate.

Forty years ago the theological niceties and organisational emphases certainly had created an ethos and a point of distinction from other Protestant denomination. But I would suggest that the laity were much more in tune with the institutional distinctions, rather than the theology that had shaped them. In particular, members of the Congregational Church were clear about the power and influence of the laity through the Church Meeting and power and influence of the deacons (who

were like elders) and staunchly defended their role in the structures locally, statewide and nationally.

The Congregational Church offered some valuable insights into the healthy relationship between the levels of leadership and resourcing within the church and the facilitating and valuing of lay leadership.

The benefits of being a small denomination were that it was possible to have direct experience of the church at national, state and the congregation level and, in the past, with ecumenical experience enriching that mix. (Do you remember those days of ecumenism?) To be effective as a congregation one appreciated the efforts of the Union at the state level for stimulation, organisational expertise, intellectual input, and to share resources of personnel, finances, buildings, and so on. And certainly the reverse was true—the national and the state level depended on the initiatives and creative drive flowing out of each congregation to act as a pool of diversity into which congregations could immerse themselves. So the experimentation in worship, social engagement or faith formation in one congregation became a resource and an example for others.

It seems that within the UCA the significance of the local manifestation of the church has been diminished and become isolated. And even at the local level the congregation has become overshadowed by the influence and power of the church council.

At the same time the relationship at the Assembly and at synod level has become more distant. Of course South Australia has been one of the unfortunate experiments in casting aside of the regional presbytery which further

accentuated the isolation of the Congregation. Do we not need to revisit the wisdom of being a conciliar church—a structural relationship which depends on healthy, trusting and mutual involvement and shared responsibility?

The UCA could well re-examine the importance of our Dissenting heritage We became so enamoured with 'unity in diversity' that we became very coy about acknowledging significant differences. We sought tolerance—and it resulted in avoidance, separation, and no longer having the need to interact or having a shared vocabulary for meaningful dialogue. This is despite the major breakthroughs in recognising the rights and particular contribution of indigenous people in the establishment of Congress, the power of standing and acting in solidarity with international church partners, and the implementation of the consensus methodology in the conduct of meetings. I have a feeling that we are living through a time when not just our own health as an organisation, but the health of our society and global network of nations depends on finding healthy ways to deal with differences in thinking and acting, and in resolution of conflicts and maintaining dialogue between groups with widely differing beliefs and practices.

The Congregational—or Independent—heritage is also a reminder of the importance of the need to question authority, to be suspicious of hierarchies within society as a whole and organisations in particular. We need to be careful to safeguard and treasure a tradition and tendency to view situations from the bottom up, from the point of view of the least significant person or groups. The very business of being an organisation is so very

perilous and so easily leads away from the focus of standing with 'least of these'. Let us practise and refine the art of being questioners and dissenters.

The UCA began with a *Statement to the Nation*—perhaps it is time for us to create a new statement for the twenty-first century. It would be a statement that might create some clarity of thinking and purpose for the secular society—equally crucial as a statement of intent and commitment for ourselves. We are facing mammoth issues when it comes to considering the long term care of our planet, and the increasing threats to security, peace and a just share of the resources for the majority of the world's population. We cannot delay in beginning this life-saving task. As a church we need to gain clarity of focus and commitment—we are called not to just manage our organisation and structures but to care for the planet our home and the quality of life for all humanity.

I suggest that we are not required to abandon past insights; on the contrary we need to re-examine, re-engage and re-commit to being a church that is non-hierarchical, conciliar, and takes seriously the worth and significance of each individual. We need to revisit the commission, that is the 'Great Commission' to demonstrate a radical love of God and neighbour as they confront us in Jesus Christ. Our calling is to be a servant community rather than a successful organisation. Of course these are not mutually exclusive but we need to reflect and evaluate the emphasis from time to time.

We are not the Uniting Church of Australia! No, we have not become the establishment!

We are not *united* but we are *uniting*—it is an ongoing process. It is a process internally and externally. It is a process not an end point. But we do need to check occasionally that we are still moving and in the right direction. We might then reach our fiftieth celebration and be grateful for the journey, grateful for those we met on the journey, grateful for the struggles on the way, and grateful for where we find ourselves as the church and the global community in twenty-first century.

Janeen Barker has had wide experience as an active member in many congregations across the nation. A noted educator, worship leader and articulate lay theologian, she has also served as a community development practitioner in the U.S.A, India and with Aboriginal people in Australia. As an advocate for social justice, Janeen recently chaired the Assembly's Social Justice reference group. She currently convenes the social issues team, part of the Effective Living Centre, a project of Christ Church Uniting, Wayville.

Methodism and the Uniting Church

Brian Howe

I suppose that I think of Methodism especially around people who impressed me when I was growing up and as a young adult and the most important of these people illustrated an important trait of the Wesleyan tradition.

Alan Walker in the Mission to the Nation in the early 1950s, I think, illustrated the outward looking, evangelical character of Methodism in his addresses at that time. When I re-read the speeches in *Australian Finding God:*

the Message of the Mission to the Nation (1953), I was impressed by their non-religious character; they spoke to the issues facing Australia in the immediate post-war period, especially in the context of being a country in the Asian-Pacific regions. The appeal of Walker was not so much one of calling people to be more religious, rather it was an appeal to us to be of good character and to be good citizens. Walker was an important voice as was Wesley on racism and it is good to be reminded how much he stressed that theme whether he was in South Africa or conducting mission in the deep south in the United States.

Colin Williams, with George Yule, wrote one of the earliest formation documents of Uniting Church when he was briefly in Melbourne teaching us theology immediately following the completion at Drew University of his PhD on John Wesley's theology today. Williams was one of the first theologians in America in mid-last century to take Wesley seriously as a theologian, and his work with others spawned a renewed interest in Wesley's intellectual contribution as opposed to his organisational skills.

Williams stressed the fact that Wesley, as post-reformation scholar, reinterpreted 'justification by faith' to emphasise the importance of grace not only bringing us to faith but also continuing to make possible our development in faith throughout our lives. It was this through-life faith that made possible the contribution of Methodists to the social transformation of Georgian England. Williams' focus on the church as mission had its influence in the struggle against racism in America in the 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, Dr Clifford J Wright, the great Christian educationalist, drew heavily on Wesley's emphasis on additional means of grace mediated especially through small groups, or class meetings as Wesley called them, designed to help foster through life faith. Wright was shocked by the ignorance of the laity of the fundamentals of Christian faith and devoted much of his life to encouraging through-life Christian education. He always taught inductively, as Wesley himself had done emphasising the importance of one's own experience along with the experience of those around us. Very much influenced by Paul Tillich, Cliff Wright made the theology of correlation his own, constantly referring to the developmental experience that we all enjoy as life moves through its various phases of birth, adolescence, settling down, work , family ageing and so on. It was this existential quality there in Wesley that Wright discovered and translated into life-forming and life-transforming Christian Education programs.

It is important in the Uniting Church to not lose the transformative spirit of Methodism that was always about changing the world as much as it was about changing the person in the image of Christ. Wesley was an intellectual and it is important not to ignore his sense of faith as being about the whole person and the whole of life. Wesley placed great emphasis on education as one of the means of building capacity for mission, transmitted often through small and informal groups. He sought to create a movement that would have as its aim transforming lives and transforming society. This continues to be a central challenge facing the Uniting Church in Australia.

Brian Howe AO is a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he teaches and researches social policy issues. He has written short biographical essays on a number of former Methodist Ministers including Alan Walker, Cliff Wright, Colin Williams and Rex Mathias.

The Uniting Church and the pre-union Presbyterian Church

Robert Renton

The first point I'd need to make is that the Presbyterian Church in Australia that existed before church union in 1977 is not the same as the current Presbyterian Church. Although the name is the same and the way in which the church is organised is much the same as it was before union, there are significant differences. The pre-union PCA was theologically broader and more tolerant of differences in understanding and expression; it saw women and men as equals in all matters (even though it was early days) and had women ministers and elders. So I am speaking now of the Presbyterian Church that existed before church union.

My second point is that the Uniting Church that commenced in 1977 is not the same as the Uniting Church that exists in 2017. Some things that the previous denominations brought into union have been lost or changed almost unrecognisably, other things, new ideas, have developed without any previous church having provided the germ of the idea. A good example of the latter is the principles and practices of consensus decision-making.

The place of the Eldership in the Uniting Church came from the Presbyterian Church. It almost never came in, though. The first draft of the Constitution and Regulations had eliminated the Eldership altogether, and it was a Methodist, the Rev. Dr Harold Wood, who effectively had the Eldership put back into the mix. What he wanted, though, was for the Eldership to perform the role that it had been supposed to perform in the Presbyterian Church, that is to be the link between the leadership of the congregation and its members through visiting and the offer of pastoral care.

So the concept of the Eldership was brought into the Uniting Church, but it is also one of the thing that has been side-lined and, in the case of many congregations, lost altogether. It never really seemed to be clearly understood what the role was and an attempt to reinvigorate the role a few years ago, I think, ended up going nowhere.

Recognising that the Methodist Church had Pacific Island and other missions and an Australian inland mission, the Presbyterian Church's contribution in these areas included the missions in Korea and Vanuatu, and the Australian Inland Mission which became Frontier Services when joined with the Methodist mission activity. There was also an incipient ethnic church movement supported by the Presbyterian Church before union, and that has become very important in the life of the Uniting Church.

A key contribution that does seem to have taken on a life of its own is the place of the presbytery in the life of the church, although that place is not uniform across Australia. In the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

presbyteries operate strongly, and I think the same could be said of New South Wales and Queensland. However, the conflation of the Synod and single presbytery in South Australia and Western Australia has confused the picture somewhat.

Another key contribution has been in the education of the ministry. Originally, it was the expectation that a minister-to-be would have gained a primary degree from university first before entering Theological Hall, so the result was that it was a six year course of study that was required for ordination. As I understand it, that is no longer required, but still the education of ministers is taken very seriously, and that could be said to be a contribution from the Presbyterian system.

Lay preachers did not play a particularly large role in the Presbyterian Church and it might fairly be claimed that the Presbyterian system was minister-centred, as the minister was usually the Moderator (chairperson) of the Kirk Session, and when a parish became vacant the Presbytery appointed a next-door minister to be the Interim Moderator (meaning that he or she would take responsibility for chairing the vacant parish's Session meetings, conduct the quarterly communion, and generally be 'responsible' for the parish). Technically, the minister was classed as the 'teaching elder'. In contrast, the Methodist Church, and particularly the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Methodist Church had a much stronger role for lay leadership in class meetings and through the role of the lay preacher.

Presbyterianism had a strong sense of the need for formality and order, some of which has been brought into the life of the Uniting Church. The Presbyterians used

what was called the Barrier Act procedure. Based on a Church of Scotland 1697 law, it was designed to make sure that nothing happened quickly! There were overtures, petitions and appeals, and the Barrier Act procedure was usually adopted after an Overture had been sustained, and an Assembly agreed that certain changes are desirable. The suggested changes were then forwarded as a remit to all relevant courts for their approval or for their disapproval. Overtures from State Assemblies were referred to presbyteries and overtures from the General Assembly of Australia were referred to State Assemblies and presbyteries. In some cases, Barrier Act procedure might also be used to even allow for comment on possible changes before they were put in final form! Even the use of the term 'courts' to describe what we call the councils of the church was indicative of the formal nature of the procedures of the Presbyterian Church.

Although we in the Uniting Church don't use the Barrier Act procedure as such, there are echoes of it in the procedures that the Assembly uses from time to time to bring about changes to the UCA constitution. Fortunately we don't have to use it to change the regulations, otherwise we would be even slower and less efficient at making necessary changes, and it is thus a 'good thing' that we are much more open to the 'movement of the Spirit' and the evangelical/social outreach of the Methodist Church.

I was asked whether there was anything of value that might still come from the Presbyterian tradition. I found that hard to answer, that's why I joined the Uniting Church on 22 June 1977 and was no longer a

Presbyterian minister! But we did bring in a lot of good people and that was certainly a vital contribution to the Uniting Church!

Robert Renton was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in November 1974 and joined the Uniting Church on 22 June 1977.