

GREVILLEA

June, 2015

Welcome to the twenty fifth edition of **Grevillea** an e-magazine to stimulate your thinking!

Why "Grevillea"? The Macquarie Dictionary defines "grevillea" as any shrub or tree of the very large, mainly Australian genus Grevillea family. Many are attractive ornamentals and a number are useful trees. It is also worth noting that grevillea can be very toxic.

So Grevillea is an Australian e-magazine which will cover a large range of subjects as time goes on. We trust they will be interesting (not just ornamental), useful and stimulate (not irritate) your thinking. We aim to have articles that will be short, practical and worth your opening them as attachments.

This edition focuses on **Influence for a Purpose through the UCA – a woman's perspective.**

Moderator of the NSW/ACT Synod Myung Hwa Park shares her fascinating journey in an address originally given at a presbytery gathering. Carolyn Thornley writes from her experience and role in the United Theological College. Rachel Kronberger draws on her experience in ministry in different congregations and synods in writing about what is normal in relation to leadership. Using her biblical expertise, Bec Lindsay writes about women and leadership. Finally from a Fijian perspective Viniana Ravetali offers her thoughts on the subject. I am sure you will find these articles interesting and encouraging whatever your gender. They call us to live up to our vision as a Uniting Church to "provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows on them" (BU par 13). The Assembly has just voted Dr Deidre Palmer to be the President-elect.

Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au.

I hope you are encouraged by this edition of *Grevillea*.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Let me again point people to significant papers from the WCC. Contact me if you would like me to email you a copy.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (\$10 for hard copies)
Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes
Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World
An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace

Journey to Leadership

Myung Hwa Park

It is my hope that as I share something of my journey with you, the important thing for us will be that you will help me to see and understand why God has called me to a leadership role in our church. And more importantly what God is doing in and through us here and now as we share our hopes and concerns for our church as we gather for this Presbytery Rally.

I was elected as the Moderator-elect for the Synod of NSW and the ACT at the Synod meeting in April 2013. After I was elected, someone said that the Uniting Church has elected an "Alien Widow" to be a moderator elect! Whether I was an alien widow, or a minister who had exercised ministry in the Uniting Church for more than 20 years, I simply responded to the Synod invitation by saying "I don't have much to give, but I will give all I have." I didn't say that to be modest but because I truly don't have much to offer. I am awfully willing and committed to do my best in any task to which I am called by God and confirmed by the people of God.

I was born in Busan, South Korea which has the most internet use of any country in the whole world. But at the time when I was born, not long after the war between South and North Korea, the situation was pretty tough and people struggled. My mother was a traditional Korean woman who married early and hoped to produce a boy child for the family. Unfortunately my mother wasn't one of the lucky ones, and even though she produced a boy child, she lost a series of children one after the other. After losing 5 children, she was desperate enough to knock on the door of the foreign hospital. Most probably for the first time in her life!

There she was helped, and most importantly she was helped to deliver her next 5 children safely from that hospital. She remembered her saving grace, a foreign midwife who had very strange braided hair wrapped around her head. My mother forgot the name of the midwife but she never forgot how grateful she was for the help she received.

As the 5th daughter in a family of seven children, in a Confucian family, I was the first one who was allowed to go to another city to study. My parents probably knew that I was a stubborn child with pretty strong will power.

Although Korea is one of the most technologically advanced countries in the world today, it was and is still a very male dominated society where women's rights and voices have been ignored and suppressed. In the past, we were told that "Women's voices should not be heard beyond the fence." It is a sad house where the hen crows loudest.

In that climate, the early missionaries started schools for girls. The very first mission school for girls was Ewha Women's School in which they recruited orphan girls and Ki sang (prostitutes) because educating women was not culturally important. And this school for girls has become the world's biggest women's university which is proud of producing many women leaders in Korean society for more than a century.

I chose Ewha University not with any ambitions for female leadership but so that I would be in a privileged position for finding a good future husband. I wasn't a Christian then! A typical student attitude in some ways, but there in the university I became a Christian.

My parents were Buddhist but I was interested in Christianity. I went to a church as a convert but I was determined that I did not want to begin as an infant. I asked the minister to give me a job as a Sunday school teacher since I was a student in a teaching college. The Methodist

church I was attending was quite methodical! The minister of the church said that I had to wait another 6 months for my baptism then I would be allowed to teach Sunday school kids.

I was always seeking something to do. My mother described me as a “willing horse“. During a prayer meeting for missionaries at the campus prayer group, I pledged to become a missionary. I thought that was the ultimate thing for me. How else can anyone serve God more than as a total stranger, what would be a stronger witness than to strangers - brothers and sisters in Christ? I began preparing myself to go to the end of the world as a missionary.

After university I taught hearing impaired children for two years and while I was there I also volunteered to lead the chapel service in the school using sign language. These experiences proved useful later in Pakistan when I was asked to lead worship services for the Korean workers in Lahore!

When I was at school I never imagined that I would go abroad and be speaking English. So English was the least interesting subject for me. Learning foreign languages wasn't easy for me although people think that I must be linguistically gifted to have picked up a number of languages. But the truth is that learning a language was only possible when I was keen to understand another's culture, wanting to be like them whether they are Pakistani, Aussie or Tongan. And also the experience of learning another language has helped me to understand what Incarnation means.

After 3 years in Pakistan, I accepted an invitation to come and reflect on my mission experience at the Pacific Mission Institute in Sydney. From the reflection I was able to see that the mission of the church is not necessarily the mission of God.

When God called Abraham to leave his father's place he did not know what was in God's mind. All Abraham had to do was to take a step in faith into the unknown future. Responding to the call from God was like that for me, a step in blind faith. I took a step out of my comfort zone, leaving my father's land for an Islamic country Pakistan, leaving my familiar environment for a strange place. Changing from someone to become a no-one.

I then trained to become an ordained minister in a multicultural church, the Uniting Church. In the 1990s I was like a Jack of all trades. I was involved in a wide range of church councils and committees. It was an exceptional opportunity for me to be able to participate in and learn about the work of the church.

But meantime I wrestled with my role in carrying out the mission of God. After 15 years as a Minister of the Word, I once again took a step into the unknown, moving from another comfort zone to an uncertain path as my family and I packed our stuff and went to Ireland. In Ireland I chose to work in a secular organization as a community support worker for people with intellectual and physical disabilities which gave me new insights into the spirituality of people with disabilities. While in Ireland, I undertook a study on Ecology and religion as part of my continuing education. From this new learning, I was able to see the interconnectedness of everything, nature, human, animals, air and water, especially creator God and the universe.

I got very excited about God's creation, and our relationship with it and with each other. God is everywhere we know and God calls us all the time. And there in Ireland, once again, I was aware of the call of God and once again, I packed up and took a step in faith to respond to this call. This time, I was excited about the Cosmic Christ, in whom the whole universe can be reconciled with the creator, God. I returned to Australia with a conviction that no matter where I am, what I am, who I meet, I am connected with the environment around me and with the people I meet because of God.

And now I am responding again to another call, from God, through the church to this position of Moderator. The call of Jeremiah has always given me assurance when accepting God's call to my various ministerial positions. What could be more comforting for me than knowing that God knew my mother! What could be more reassuring than knowing that God has designed our lives for a special purpose!

No matter what role I am called to fulfill, no matter what task I am entrusted with, each day I can rest in the promise of God to be with me, to guide and strengthen me, as I live out my call to be a disciple of Christ Jesus.

Preparing Women in Ministry Formation to be people of influence in the UCA

Carolyn Thornley

I was a girl of the 60s in New Zealand, a country that had voted for equal rights for women in 1893. The period of my youth was also the 'flower power' era when there was a growing acceptance of the questioning of past norms, safe contraception was available and there was huge opposition to Apartheid and the Vietnam War. Girls were still steered towards particular careers but that finished shortly after I left secondary school. Discipling through my teenage years in the Methodist Church led to Sunday School teaching and then later becoming a Youth Group leader. This led me into a teaching career - always being interested in the education of children and adults, especially women.

It wasn't until I began teaching in the Australian System, joining particular community organisations and reading for University Courses, that I first came across the term 'the glass ceiling' in relation to the advancement of women. It was through teaching in a Catholic School in Sydney and being a pastoral carer in that community that I followed a call to Uniting Church Ministry.

My first year at United Theological College was 1992 as a part-time evening student. In 1994 I entered as a full-time candidate. It was the first year that there were more women than men entering their initial year at College. For many women the call to ministry is the beginning of a second career. At the time there was some flexibility in the Bachelor of Theology, even though women had to take courses in Feminist Theology off site. I mourn the fact, even now, that courses in Liberation and Feminist Theology are not mandated for all theology students within the Bachelor of Theology degree.

In 2005 the NSW ACT Synod passed a number of recommendations from a major Report on Theological Education which have been put into practice by the College and which have had both positive and negative ramifications for women.

Firstly let me highlight some of these recommendations.

"(iv) request the Commission for Specified Ministry and United Theological College to work together to:

(a) make provision for candidates to engage in theological education and ministerial formation through both full-time and part-time pathways

(b) ensure that candidates have a range of ministerial experiences including geographical relocation, such as rural orientation periods for short, intense terms

(c) ensure that integration occurs across the educational activities that are offered

(d) ensure that United Theological College assists candidates to develop competencies in the areas identified in Chapter 5 of this report by paying particular attention to the following areas:

1. communicating with people and relating to them in individual and group contexts, including understanding and adapting to the personal and social contexts in which the Candidates find themselves (especially where those are very different from the contexts with which the Candidate is already experienced and comfortable),

2. modeling faith and helping others to connect their faith with their life, assist people in adult spiritual formation, including adapting their ministry and theological reflections to the different needs they find around them,

3. being servant leaders and disciples, and equipping and encouraging others to be so too by exploring leadership more explicitly and reflecting on it more thoroughly during education and formation

4. leading and managing teams of people, including mentoring, delegating, negotiating, mediating and resolving conflicts."

For women, having the option of part-time pathways has meant being able to be a candidate alongside part-time childcare or part-time work and having experience of work in the church recognised as part of their formation.

A complicating factor, yet necessary for the enrichment of ministry, has been the number of additional courses and orientations. For example, Rural Ministry Experience, Clinical Pastoral Education/Urban Ministry Formation, Community Development and Sydney Alliance Training, Leadership Development and Conflict Management and Peacemaking have been added to the Formation Programme and require far more of a time commitment than previously. These extra courses and orientations mean negotiating with part-time work and childcare facilities to allow extra weeks of time for formation.

From my ministry experience in Fiji, the Northern Beaches of Sydney and the Western Sydney Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery, I feel there are concerns about how ordained women are encouraged to be representatives on particular church committees and how they are supported, especially in their leadership role as ministers. We in the Uniting Church have claimed that both women and men are accepted as equals and yet for the majority of years in

the early 2000s and, until the recent Moderator was appointed, there have been a line of male Moderators of the NSW/ACT Synod and Presidents of the Uniting Church. This is a concern for all women in the Uniting Church because appearances do not match our principles.

Ordained women in ministry placements were invited to a one and a half day gathering about five years ago at the Centre for Ministry to meet together, network, and look at issues of Affirmative Action (a concern of the NSW/ACT Synod and the Assembly). In following up there was conversation about how we could identify gifts in ordained women, send them to particular courses and then put their names forward to be members of church committees. This has been difficult to follow up. Members were also requested to create women in ministry groups within their Presbyteries and begin to identify gifts and skills in each other that could be offered to the wider UCA processes. At least one Presbytery has included female candidates in its women in ministry network group.

With this as a background I am very conscious about my role at the College and about being intentional about confident women taking their place as leaders within congregations, faith communities, organisations and institutions of the Uniting Church. By confident I mean having the ability to model discipleship, to follow, relate and believe in living out with God the struggle of this world, growth in the "continued practice of wisdom and faith" (Tim Ling), to encourage people to use their gifts and to hold a vision which enables others to talk their stories.

How do we ensure this?

The Formation Programme is comprehensive. Expectations are high. Whilst there is an understandable focus on academic study there is also an emphasis on the more practical, reflective aspects of ministry, i.e. self care, setting good boundaries, having a resilience for long term ministry, theological reflection, spiritual formation, emotional and cultural intelligence, holding the 'being' and 'doing' of ministry together, having a pastoral and ecclesial imagination, reflective practice which is effective and critical in looking at events, situations and actions in a prayerful way, naming and managing conflict, leading, being a member of and working in a team and leadership and management qualities.

Women in their collaborative way of working are models for understanding Christian truth and practice. In *Developing Faithful Ministry*, (p.56), Sue Cross, who writes a chapter on the 'The Teacher-Learner Relationship', says "Gender, psychological type, social class, sexual orientation and ethnicity all create differences in the way adults take in information about the world and process it." Being in a Christian Learning Community requires transparency and openness. In order to experience and learn from others, the College tries to make sure that at

some stage women in formation experience, either before or through their time at College, work with women in ordained ministry. There are opportunities for this to happen in the Field Education Programme or as Mentor, Presbytery Carer or Presbytery Contact person.

Formation means transformation: discerning the work of the spirit, being immersed in theological education and reflection from an adult learning perspective. Transformation means *metanoia* - a change of heart and mind or outlook which means letting go of preconceived ideas and no longer operating in the same way. The integration of life experiences and learning is a critical aspect of theological education and ongoing ministry practice. Many women coming in as candidates already integrate experiences and have a flexibility in how they operate. In conversations with me I know that many of them are constantly juggling responsibilities in life.

Women are often credited with intuitively having resilience for ministry. Their natural ability to be perceptive and follow their gut feelings help them to cope, manage and maintain a career in ministry. Burns, Chapman and Guthrie in their book *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* state there are five themes of resilient ministry:

- (1) Spiritual formation and using spiritual disciplines.
- (2) Self care that includes exercise, a nutritious diet, having intimate friends and a peer group.
- (3) Emotional Intelligence - being self-aware in being in touch with one's own feelings, managing emotions and responding to others' feelings, and Cultural Intelligence - knowing that we have particular cultural patterning of thinking, feeling and reacting and then being able to understand others, discern and evaluate with humility and develop cultural values that build up trust.
- (4) Knowing that ministry is a lifestyle therefore the conflicting loyalties of church and home need to be managed well and healthy boundaries need to be in place.
- (5) In leadership and management to constantly reflect, perceive the politics of ministry and systems thinking through modeling, shepherding, supervising conflict, managing expectations and planning.

Within the context of this article it must not be forgotten that the planning of the Formation Programme is for both women and men. This has become a three year cycle with a particular focus for each year; Spiritual Formation, Leadership and Community Development. The three year cycle does not only focus on the priestly and diaconal focus of ministry tasks, but includes Steven Croft's Third Dimension of intentionally abling and building community, discernment in identifying charisms of others and enabling them in ministry, collaboration, vision and guiding the Church through a period of change.

Roger Matthews in a chapter 'Asking Questions' from *Developing Faithful Ministers* says we need to develop a questioning culture and notes that those with the ability to ask questions

have the ability to listen well. How are women encouraged to ask questions in whatever space they find themselves in and how are their reflections and questions valued by other students? In a questioning culture individuals are more likely to admit that they don't know all the answers. Perhaps, for women, this gives permission for perceptions, intuitions and gut feelings to emerge. Questions can empower. Hence it is important to encourage the asking of questions but also questioning of self.

The fact that women make up fifty percent this year or more in past years of the candidate community means that as a group and as individuals they have the numbers to ensure that their concerns are heard and that their questions are taken seriously. As the Uniting Church moves into its next phase of life we trust that the principles we uphold as a community of faith are lived out together.

I wish to finish with these ongoing questions for the wider church concerning ordained women.

How does the Presbytery coach ordained women and encourage them to develop and use their individual gifts and skills for the wider work of the church?

How does the Presbytery and Synod ensure that ordained women are valued and their abilities recognised, especially at time when there is an increasing trend towards Lay Leadership of the Church?

Bibliography

Burns, Bob, Chapman, Tash D. and Guthrie, Donald C., *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*, IVP Books, Illinois, 2013

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Ling, Tim and Bentley, Lesley, eds, *Developing Faithful Ministers*, SCM Press, 2012

Being normal

Rachel Kronberger

It is nearly 90 years since Winifred Kiek's ordination in the Congregational church in Australia and today, almost a third of active Uniting Church ministers are women. Being asked to write here about my experience of being a woman in congregational ministry is only slightly less strange than being asked to write about being a woman voter or driver or property owner! Is a woman minister still perceived to be out of the ordinary - less than normal - even abnormal? Why is this?

At its beginning the Uniting Church was committed to the ministry and leadership of women. The Joint Commission on Church Union, with its all-male membership developed this vision, ensuring the introduction of women's ordination in each of the member churches prior to union. Nearly forty years later and despite gender quotas on some councils of the church, we seem to have settled into an

acceptance that our church culture is male-dominated. Have we left it too late to seek a church that, in Christ, is neither male nor female? From where do we find energy to pursue the leadership of women? Perhaps like many people approaching forty, we might undertake some self-reflection and evaluation. I don't believe it is too late to change what is currently normal and to live into our own hopes and dreams.

What is normal?

1. Ministers

For the most part, the *normative minister* in the Uniting Church is still a mature white man. The title 'Minister' on its own connotes this image, so that the title has to be qualified in order to address any difference from the norm. *Tongan Minister* or *young Minister* might be applied to men who differ, but for women this distance from the normative is multiplied by the extra word required - a *young woman Minister* or a '*young Tongan woman Minister*' for example. On its own, being a woman has not affected the willingness of the church to receive my gifts or service, especially now that I can no longer be called 'young'. In many places it is still a big deal to be a young woman in ministry, or a woman of colour or a woman with a disability or a woman with a non-mainstream family structure. On most measures I comfortably identify with the mainstream in both church and culture. But I'm sure my male colleagues have never, like me, been sent home from a 3pm pastoral visit to cook the dinner, despite having a competent spouse at home planning the meal. I'm also fairly certain they would not have had their (pregnant) tummies patted or been considered outrageously rude to ask a question of a church council member. The experiences of men and women in the ministry in the UCA are both affected by this understanding of 'normal'.

2. Leaders

A second issue flows immediately on from our normative view of The Minister: our normative view of our church leaders. My experience of congregational ministry has never been in isolation from the whole church. I have delighted, as I committed to doing at my ordination, in participating in the councils of the church and offering my gifts wherever they may be used. My collegial life is deeply sustaining and my teachers, mentors and companions form a deep part of my call to congregational ministry. Thus it is immediately relevant to my experience of congregational ministry that the church has not diligently sought the leadership gifts of women beyond the congregation or chaplaincy setting. If women are not valued in leadership then where are we valued? At the time of writing we have had one woman President of the Assembly in our 38 years, and not one ordained woman. In NSW we recently installed the second only ordained woman as Moderator of the Synod. (Some synods have successfully practiced a culture of alternating between men and women moderators; some that used to do this have let the practice slide.) This not only reflects an unwillingness in the church to elect women into leadership roles but an unconscious preference for nurturing and forming men for leadership in the church.

Why is it normal?

I have come to understand that bright young men inspire the church about its future, and so they are formed for leadership, sometimes over many years. Young women are simply not visible in the same way because as a church we still don't

know how to recognise the cohort of potential leaders in their ranks. I have also come to understand that gracious Christian men who feel called into leadership are intuitively conscious of others who also sense such a call and make space for their male peers to contribute their gifts. Women peers and their call to leadership are not visible in the same way as men. I hope that the late, great Joan Kirner's insight about secular politics is not also true of our church: "Women are accepted if *servicing* but not if *controlling*. We might be accepted as a [government] minister, even a deputy leader, but the leader controls, controls the government, influences the state, the country." Could it be, that in our 'servant leadership' model of ministry we have allowed women to be the servants and men to be the leaders? In the arguments for establishing the order of Deaconess in the 19th Century in Australia, the Rev Mervyn Archdall believed that women should exert influence in the world but not if they showed 'any unwomanly or unreasonable ambition' (*Deaconess*, 6 April 1895).^{*} Could it be that the ambitions of male leaders are invisible to us except as a calling, but that the ambitions of women are highly visible and somewhat unattractive? At the beginning of the Uniting Church we continued to imagine ourselves as different - distinct - in our recognition of the gifts of the whole people of God. What persists as normal bears greater resemblance to the secular world than to the vision of our founders.

Challenging the norm.

It is appropriate to ask whether this reluctance to identify, form, and elect women leaders is productive in our desire to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Australia. A recent study into ASX listed corporations found that

In the United States, companies with a higher representation of women on their boards had a return on equity that was 53% higher, a return on sales that was 42% higher and a return on invested capital that was higher by 66%.^{**}

While our measures of success would be radically different to those in the corporate world, these figures suggest that any organization without women in leadership is substantially diminished in its capacity. In the UCA there is a cognitive dissonance between who we say we are and who we are in practice. The inequity in our leadership structures is contrary to what was intended, to what was hoped for. Its causes are nuanced and will take careful study if we are to address this issue.

I have recently commenced my third congregational placement since ordination. My gifts and my work have always been welcome in the worship of the church at a local level. In church councils my gifts have usually been made welcome and I have served in Presbytery, Synod and Assembly contexts. I have represented the Uniting Church at international and ecumenical gatherings and have witnessed the challenges still facing women leaders in other Christian churches. It is this Uniting Church which formed me in the faith from the time of my infant baptism, and nurtured me into discipleship and ministry. It is this Uniting Church in which I live out my calling as a Minister of the Word, by the grace of God. For us to realize this vision of the UCA and its forefathers we will need to work together, men and women alike, to be our best as the Body of Christ, to the glory of God.

^{*}Anne O' Brien *Christian Church Workers* in *The Encyclopedia Of*

Women & Leadership In Twentieth-Century Australia.

** Conrad Liveris quoted in the Committee for Perth's [Filling the Pool](#) report into gender equity in Western Australian Corporations.

Imaging God

Bec Lindsay

A dear friend gifted me a picture not long ago. It is her imagining of Moses' encounter with God in Exodus 33 and 34:

Moses said, 'Show me your glory, I pray.' And God said, 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, "YHWH"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But', God said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live. See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen' (Ex. 33: 18-23).

Moses sees God's back, bows his head towards the earth and worships. My friend reimagines this scene. Instead of glimpsing God's backside, we encounter God's full-frontal beauty. And she is glorious, resplendent. The image makes me smile. It's brimming with life and vibrant colours. It is playful, respecting the creativity of a creating God. I have placed the picture above my desk at home, to remember that God keeps on taking me by surprise. And, when I see it, I am reminded to be thankful for the women who have influenced and nurtured my life of discipleship.

Laughing with Sarah

I grew up in churches where women's voices were rarely heard from the front. When I was a teenager our congregation received their first female deacon. I was so excited. It seemed as though the world had shifted somehow. When she left, I remember this minister, let's call her Sarah, naming that in three years she had been allowed to preach on only 8 occasions. And each time the senior minister criticised her for not having developed her preaching skills. She performed her tasks with diligence and care- she loved the community, she prepared rich hospitality for unexpected guests- but listening behind the entrance to the tent she could only laugh¹. How could her gifts be nourished and her graces received if she was not able to fully participate? Was it Sarah or the church who was barren?

I laughed as I discovered the reflections of theologian Janet Martin Soskice. While teaching at an English theological college she was confronted with a double-standard for the male and female ordinands. She came to a realisation, shocking in its simplicity: "God *loves* women."²

¹ See the story of Sarah in Genesis 18

² Janet Martin Soskice (1995) *Women's Problems* in Ann Loades (ed) *Spiritual Classics from the late Twentieth century*. London: National Society/Church House Printing. pp47-54

Sarah laughed in the face of the unimaginable. Soskice laughed in disbelief that this was a new realisation for her. I laughed to imagine that there might be a place even for my voice and gifts and graces and to discover a church that was willing to use them. The Uniting Church has affirmed the role of women, including in ordained ministry, since union. Yet anecdotally we seem still to lag behind. There has only been one female President. Within my own NSW/ACT Synod there have been only four female moderators from twenty-six.

Dancing with Miriam

From a dearth of women role models I found myself immersed with diverse voices through a year on Iona. So many stories and dreams were shared, anguish and terror, hope and joy. This was a place of intense encouragement of sisters- rich and conservative American tourists, rough Glaswegian teenagers, sing-song progressive Scandinavians, Iranian refugees and a rainbow of others. All these people trying to follow after Jesus. In these muddled groupings I learned to see myself. It is when we can bring our whole selves, our authentic selves, our complicated and messy selves to each other in community that we learn freedom together. I learn that who I am might be enough. That in the fullness of God and the bizarrely broad community God gathers me into, my broken, frail, inadequate self, might be enough. Communities need midwives to birth such vulnerable acceptance.

One week the L'Arche community came to stay. They taught us their songs of joy in community, gathered up together by God's Spirit. One service of worship was particularly beautiful. As the full Abbey sang together one member of L'Arche got up and began to dance through the aisles. She was completely at ease, herself. She became vulnerable to all those gathered, slowly taking up the hands of those she passed and inviting them to join her in claiming this space of unrestrained joy. The Spirit of God was a tangible presence of uplifting welcome. Bodies of all sorts were embraced and deemed beautiful. They joined the echo of ancient tambourines as Miriam and the women sang and danced for exodus liberation.³

Mourning with Rizpah

Sarah laughed. Miriam danced. Rebekah was a trickster. Jacob would not have got very far without his mother's determination. Potiphar's wife had a lusty sense of entitlement. Or perhaps she was simply bored by her life in the palace. Deborah offered wise-counsel. Rizpah bore witness to injustice and stood up to powers⁴. Women's voices are not unanimous. Women are shaped by different expectations and experiences. We want different things. We have different gifts and graces. Sometimes we hold power. Often we encounter discrimination. Women are complicated.

Rizpah mourned her sons. She spread out sackcloth and made of her own body a memorial to her children- sons of Saul killed to blot out his line and ensure power remained in David's

³ See Miriam's song in Exodus 15.

⁴ See Rizpah's story in 2 Samuel 21.

hands. I imagine her wailing at the birds and wild beasts, staring down dominating power through her strong actions and raw grief. Experiencing domination is a thread shared across the diversity of women. It seems that many people want to deny that we live with male privilege. Yet we see its signs around us- family violence, pay gaps, words used to describe women in public roles. I want to sit with Rizpah, in the community of our church, and stare down the powers, whatever they might look like and wherever they might be found.

Women are complicated, just like our Trinitarian understanding of God. I find myself drawn to the stories of those who have learned how to pay attention. I am captivated by the idea that God is just as present in the mundane tasks of the everyday as anywhere else, perhaps even more so. I see the power of Rizpah's stance, as the Davids of the world take notice.

Travelling on the road with Priscilla (and Aquila)

Many of those who have taught me what it is to trust my own complicated, authentic voice have been men. In the setting of my formal theological education, the two teachers who lived and taught by feminist practices, who most coaxed my self-confidence and encouraged me to read the work of women were men. All of us who hold power must learn how to step back, to enable other voices to be heard. Not to speak on their behalf, but to take up our own influence to lift up others. I wonder what it was like to travel with Priscilla and Aquila. What filled their conversations on their discipleship adventures? How did the communities they taught encounter Christ through them?

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg is a Jewish scholar. She looks for the traces within the biblical texts of unspoken communication and relationships between people and between people and God. She names these traces as the murmurings of the deep within the stories of Scripture. She writes, "The abyss of otherness from which we reach out to translate and retranslate the world may be invisible, but it is not inaudible. Murmurings, whisperings, restless cracklings of life animate that space between us and within us."⁵ By seeking to focus on such murmurings of the in-between spaces of a text, we allow the possibility of new meaning to emerge. Sometimes we find voices in a story that we didn't realise were there. Life is a lot like texts. Some voices are loud and confident. Others whisper. If only those with ears would listen.

I look back over to the image over my desk. It's worth noting that many of the people who have seen my friend's picture don't see that it shows a female body. They are captivated by the colours, they notice something in the place where the womb would be. But they do not see what is before them. The murmurings still need help to become more than a whisper. I think that women's voices in our church are often like that picture. There is so much creative potential, so much vibrance. There are restless cracklings of life animated by God's spirit-breath still hovering over creation. But we have to be willing to look past the most obvious and loud responses of theology and polity (politics?) to hear.

⁵ Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg (2009) *The murmuring deep*. Schocken Books.

Influence for a Purpose through the UCA

Viniana Ravetali

My instant reaction when asked to write for *Grevillea* was that I might not write as well as others, namely, those who've been in the church longer than I have and have played influential roles in it. At the same token, it is a privilege to share my thoughts and experiences of being a minority ethnic woman leader in the church and community. This article shares some of my own stories and experiences of life that continues to help me strive on being an influential person.

The Influence of Family & Good Education:

I'm the middle child of a strong Christian middle-class family of five girls and no boys. Born and raised in Fiji, our hard working parents centred and disciplined us culturally, biblically, spiritually and academically. They believed that good education would go far, and a key to prosperous life if led by God. We understood God to be Sacred and Holy, and we were taught to worship him with absolute reverence.

We were also reminded that the sacred is all around us in every sight we see, in every place we go, in every creature we meet, in everything we touch. All of creation is infused with the presence of God!! My dad loved all living creatures...he would get angry if we even stepped on an ant or cockroach. His love for God's creation was passed on and inherited by his children.

Every indigenous Fijian is traditionally born into a particular cultural role and expectations through the lenses of their belonging in a family unit called 'Tokatoka'. Tokatoka literally means a 'seat or a place to stay in'...signifying the identity and belonging of each person. A few Tokatoka makes up the enlarged family unit or clan (Mataqali), which then represents a village.

I'm a descendent of the 'Sau-Turaga' unit which means the 'steward chief'. The word 'Turaga' is a male noble or master with the connotation of male orientation. Jesus Christ is normally referred to as 'Turaga'. Being a hierarchical patriarchal society, the Sau Turaga holds the responsibility of one that is most closest in rank to the chief. They are the advocate, spokesman and disciplinary agent of chiefs. They are also the only ones that can install a chief and can hold this position temporarily if the need arises. This is a prestige, second highest clan of the Fijian social hierarchy system.

As a family with girls only, our father who was the eldest son of his family had no option but to teach his girls the responsibilities of our cultural roles and its expectations. He led us to believe that these special roles were also God-given and not only for men, but also for women. The insights and inspirations of these family traditional teachings was further influenced by the school motto of the all-girls high school (Adi Cakobau School) that I attended in my teenage years; **"Leave the world a better place than you found it"**. In this school, young girls are taught to be high achievers and transformational agents in all areas and disciplines of life, so that the world can be a better place to live in.

From Fiji to Australia:

I migrated to Australia in the early 1980s around the time when a lot of work was being done by the government of the day on the Australian Human Rights Commission. The new act on equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination was introduced together with diversity in the workplace in terms of ages, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation and so on. As a

young migrant woman it was a far cry from the traditional hierarchical men's world that had dominated my life. It was like a breath of fresh air, and a landscape of opportunity emerged with it. Part time studying was on the agenda and I was fortunate to work in the Finance industry for twenty two years where early years of employment led to working closely with HR departments that helped develop effective and best practice guidelines to the new act. Upon reflection, I believe the secular world generally does a much better work in this area than the church!

The Church:

Coming from the Fiji Methodist Church (FMC), it was a natural transition into the Uniting Church in Australia for me. As pointed out by Rev Veitinia Waqabaca in one of her articles; "Joining the Uniting Church was not about choice but a matter of natural progression. The Fiji Methodist Church grew out of the Australian Methodist Church as far back as the pre-colonial days. After the Australian Methodists joined the Uniting Church union in 1975, the two Churches have remained firm working partners to this day. So the infrastructure and relationships were already there for those who were seeking to find a home". (Richmond & Yang (eds), *Crossing Borders*, 2006, pg 179).

The *Basis of Union* states that "God in Christ has given to men and women in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The church's call is to serve that end, to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself". (*Basis of Union* par 3).

Yet, as a woman with special gifts, it was difficult to take up a leadership role in the Fijian church. It took years of hard work, perseverance, commitment and constant battle of proving oneself, not only to the church community but the wider community. My foundational belief arises out of my understanding of the mystery of God at the core of all creation. A creation that is interdependent and a humanity that is made in the image of God, with each person loved of God and of intrinsic worth and value for who they are – not their sexuality or what they achieve. Therefore, I see diversity of nature, humanity and cultures as a blessing and cause for celebration. The 'good news' brings life and freedom in different ways to different people as they are empowered.

This foundational belief carried me out in my own life experiences (personal & professional), and from time to time lead me to question the place, meaning and relevance of faith in the face of day to day life. I am reminded of the unfolding stories of people of God as expressed in the Scriptures as parallel search: In their life journey the people questioned their world and circumstances; their relationships and way of life; and their understanding of the role and relationship of God within that. This continues to be a vital place in my own faith journey as I wrestle with what I see and experience now in ministry, community and the world around us and continue discerning how we are called to be bearers of good news in this time and place.

Influence for a purpose through the UCA:

As a mother of four and grandmother of six, I align myself with those who see themselves as life-givers, life-sustainers because of their proactive function as creator, nurturer and protector of families. There's something biblical about this stance. I'm reminded of the Fijian traditional ritual of the coming of womanhood of a young girl that helps prepare her for the hardships of giving birth and other challenges and joy associated with her mothering.

Similarly the church prepares men and women for ministry in all its joy, challenges and struggles. It is encouraging to see the increase of women leaders in the church, especially as ordained ministers.

Plenty of work has been done to advocate for the place of women in the church and society, challenging the status quo for women's equality and vigilance inspiring positive change. Having women cohorts and mentors in the church helps, as this allows realistic continuous dialogues of issues and struggles faced by women, especially so for those of minority ethnic and hierarchical patriarchal background like myself.

A lot of changes is taking place in our church today and the challenges of how to do church in this day and age remains to be the pressing question. As a minister, I mostly find myself wearing multiple leadership hats at one time – as a wife, parent, grandmother, church leader, community leader etc, and I'm usually conscious of being a 'role model'. As such I find my leadership style as challenging the status quo, inspire clear mutual vision, empowers member through co-operative teamwork, lead by example, and encourage the 'hearts' of those I'm in contact with.

Apart from the general tasks of congregational ministry, I believe that I am also uniquely called to working with non-Anglo women ministers in particular, in networking and sharing of stories and experiences, especially in communities and cultures where ordained women are not looked upon favourably. Similarly, working with Pacific Island ministers also - this will be an environment of upholding one another, and of encouragement and nurturing each other. For example, I initiated and have since coordinated the gathering of the Georges River Presbytery Pacific Island Ministers, meeting three times a year. Apart from feasting, this has been a platform of sharing-together, offering encouragement in the challenges that include members of our family.

Also importantly, I have always seen myself as a bridge between the Fijian congregations and the wider church and I believe that part of this unique call is to help bridge the gap between the UCA and Fijian communities. My position as Chairperson of the NSW-ACT Synod Multicultural Advisory Group (MMAG) over the last few years, have also affirmed that this 'bridging the gap' is a call not only for the Fijians, but the minority ethnic communities within the church. As a Fijian woman, my gifts of leadership are especially important; and as an Australian Fijian, my passion for cross cultural and multiculturalism provide unique opportunities for bringing about a greater understanding and unity between the minority ethnic congregations and the wider ethos of the church.

As I look into the synoptic Gospels, I'm encouraged that it contains a relatively high number of references to women and as we all know, there's no recorded instance where Jesus disgraces, belittles, reproaches, or stereotypes a woman. Christ was known to favour women and the scriptures tell us that Jesus is instructive for inferring his attitudes toward women and show repeatedly how he liberated and affirmed women. He sees a woman, a person of dignity and worth, a beloved child of God. In short he sees a sacred being...what we call in Fijian "e dua na ka-tabu", someone who bears in her very being, the image of God.

You can grow into the fullness of your sacredness. You can become someone who people know that when they've been in your presence they experienced something of the sacred, something of God! You can be one of those people in whose presence others know that the Kingdom of God has come near! When everyone sees you, they catch a glimpse at the Spirit of God in you. Not just because you are God's own handiwork... not just because you are created in the image of God...But because within you, there is God! Within you there is all the potential to be Christ-like, to be God-like, to bring to fullness in your own being the essence of the holy God who is love!

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