

# GREVILLEA

June, 2017

Welcome to the twenty ninth 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 **The Uniting Church at 40.**

In this edition there are articles from people involved in a range of ministries as the Uniting Church turns 40. Stephen Robinson documents the development of disaster recovery ministry which now assists people not only in Australia but also in the Pacific. Bronwyn Murphy writes about the Saltbush project for rural and remote ministry. As a person who has only known the Uniting Church, Danielle Hemsworth-Smith offers her reflection as a newly ordained Minister. Keith Hamilton writes about making courageous and wise decisions at Parramatta Mission to enable effective caring ministry. Finally Haloti Kailahi shares about his experience as a Tongan Australian who changed from a significant secular role to become a Uniting Church Minister.

Let me draw attention to my new book, *Thinking the Faith, Living the Faith: an introduction to Christian theology*. It is available from MediaCom.

*Grevillea* is available online on the Assembly website in the Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship section under Other Resources. Past editions can be accessed there: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/cudw> Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is: [chrisw@nat.uca.org.au](mailto:chrisw@nat.uca.org.au)

I hope you are stimulated by this edition of *Grevillea*. It will in fact be the final edition as I finish in my role with the Assembly at the end of July.

Grace and peace  
Chris Walker

# Disaster Recovery Ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia

Stephen Robinson

## Author's Introduction

There is a danger in trying to write a comprehensive history of anything, particularly when one has an extensive involvement in one area or timeframe. In doing this, any history will be incomplete and unbalanced. Having said “yes” to the task in an unguarded moment, the following is a brief attempt to record a snapshot of the development of disaster recovery ministry across the Uniting Church in Australia. A decent body of work would need to follow to do justice to the many people who have served in this area. My apologies to them. This article primarily covers what has happened in the years from 2007 to 2017.

## Uniting Church involvement in state responses

Each State and Territory in Australia has its own disaster recovery plans and recovery arrangements. These have largely evolved in response to major events such as Cyclone Tracy in Darwin, the Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria and South Australia, the Granville Train Crash in NSW. The Uniting Church has played an important role over the years; largely through individuals who were inspired to respond in a way which saw more formal initiatives follow.

In Victoria, The Emergencies Ministry was established the same year as the Uniting Church – 1977 – by John Hill, a Uniting Church minister, in response to a significant weather emergency in Mildura<sup>1</sup>. He saw the need for the church to address the needs of people in the community affected by a storm. From this came the development of a network of pastoral carers in the district, then the state. Eventually this was to become what is now known as VCCEM – an ecumenical ministry operating under the Victorian Council of Churches. This network was tested heavily in reaction to the Black Saturday Fires of 2009. At that time, VCCEM had 280 clergy volunteers. With the broadening of volunteers to laity it now has nearly 1700 volunteers.

In South Australia, extensive fires of 1980 and February 1983 devastated a large area, resulting in loss of life and property. Various churches in South Australia took an important role in community recovery. The Uniting Church was given the lead role in coordinating ecumenical disaster recovery ministry in the state, along with some left-over welfare funds from the event to enable this. Andrew Clarke was involved in gathering lay and ordained volunteers to work in preparation for, and response to, natural disasters. Since August 2013 this role of oversight has been taken up by Wendy Perkins. This ministry is now known as “Disaster and Recovery Ministries” which operates under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Housing SA (the department responsible for disaster welfare in the state of South Australia).

Queensland is Australia's most disaster-affected state – struck regularly by cyclones and floods as well as bushfire and drought. Here, Lifeline Community Recovery (operating under the Synod) has consistently been involved in bringing teams to care for people in affected areas, including events such as the McKay floods of 2008 and the floods of 2011, which

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<sup>1</sup> Penny Mulvey – Crosslight – “Spiritual First Responders” February 19, 2017.  
<http://crosslight.org.au/2017/02/19/spiritual-first-responders/>

included devastation in other areas including Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley where Lifeline counsellors provided psychological first aid. Following the 2011 events, the Synod formed a Disaster Response Committee, chaired by Rev. Kay Ronalds. Rev. Linda Hamill was ministering in storms and floods in the Gap, Brisbane and Maranoa, and experienced the value of receiving peer support from Rev. Bob Rutherford, a DRCN chaplain from NSW, loaned to the churches of the Maranoa area in its recovery. Recognising the value of supporting ministers post-disaster, Linda has since become the coordinator of the Queensland Synod's peer team.

West Australia, the Uniting Church brought a number of specific responses to fire and weather events. Rob Dummermuth – for some years the West Nullarbor Patrol Minister – coordinated the Synod's response. The WA Synod now has a disaster management plan, initiated by Gordon Scantlebury, with David Jackson taking on the role of coordination since late 2016.

In NSW, the Granville Train Crash of 1977 was a watershed event which forged a state welfare response. Following this, Rev. Alan Galt, a Uniting Church minister, was a member of the NSW Disaster Welfare Coordinating Committee and, for 5 years chaired the Personal Services and Welfare Information Subcommittee. This brought together a largely church-based network of care in response to disaster which included the Uniting Church, St Vincent De Paul, Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and Anglicare. Apart from the absence of St Vincent de Paul (and the formal inclusion of the Uniting Church to coordinate ecumenical chaplaincy through the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network), this combination of partners has remained intact to today. Rev. Alan Galt was responsible for convening the Synod's Disaster Recovery Committee.

When Alan Galt retired from the Synod Disaster Recovery Committee in 2005, Stephen Robinson became the committee's convenor, and his replacement in the NSW State Welfare Committee. This led to the creation of the NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) with the signing of a memorandum of Understanding with the Synod and Department of Community Services in 2009. As in South Australia, in NSW the Uniting Church remains the coordinating body for ecumenical chaplaincy, and working in cooperating with the government and other key agencies in disaster response. Since this time, DRCN chaplains have supported people through many traumatic events including floods, fires, and others including the Quaker's Hill Nursing Home Fire and Martin Place Siege. At the time of this formation, Stephen Robinson was in placement at Lugarno Peakhurst Uniting Church. The congregation allowed a generous level of Stephen's time to be used in developing this ministry, with one third of it eventually being sponsored by the Synod. During that time Stephen was 'loaned' to other Synods to bring support to ministry agents following disasters, including the Black Saturday Fires of 2009 in Victoria and 2011 floods in Queensland.

### Intentional Recovery Ministry Placements

Virtually every Synod of the church has responded to disaster with the establishment of short-term targeted disaster recovery placements following major events. In more recent times these have included: fire and flood events in Victoria including fencing ministries at Loddon Mallee, Coonabarabran fires, flash flooding at Lockhart and Dungog in NSW, the Pinery Fires in South Australia and Esperance Fires in WA. Queensland's Central and Northern Presbyteries are shortly to commence a placement of a disaster recovery community chaplain

in the wake of TC Debbie. The intentional funding and placing of people in these situations have proven to be invaluable.

## Assembly Initiatives

The Assembly has brought resources to ministry in disaster recovery throughout this time. Rev. Dorothy McRae McMahon had a heart for the church's involvement in community distress and, for a time, a national committee worked to bring resources and support. A separate committee has since overseen a Disaster Relief Fund (available to Synods, Presbyteries, Congregations and agencies of the church), and the Assembly has continued to be the repository of liturgical resources. In 2009 Philip Liebelt gathered a wide range of post-disaster liturgies and articles relevant to ministry in such settings, and edited a volume entitled "Carrying Rainbows of Hope: Liturgical resources for use after disasters and personal tragedies". This was published by the Assembly and is still available as a valuable PDF resource from the Assembly webpage<sup>2</sup>.

In 2013 the new full-time position of National Disaster Recovery Officer, with the Uniting Church Assembly, was established and Rev. Dr. Robinson took up the role. This had been created, with support from the Synods of NSW and others, to allow for development and support of disaster recovery ministry across the councils and agencies of the Uniting Church. With this role in place, a number of new initiatives were introduced. Peer Support, first developed in the NSW/ACT Synod, is the practice of training ministers to care for ministers and congregational leaders during times of crisis. This formal network of care was established in NSW/ACT and in Queensland, with some training in this work in WA and South Australia. Since 2014, the coordinators of disaster recovery in each synod have met on an annual basis and exchanged lessons and resources each year. This has made it possible to develop and support inter-synod sharing of people and resources in crisis.

## National Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Networks

A very significant recent development has been resourcing and training in relation to disaster recovery chaplaincy. Facilitated by the establishment of the National Disaster Recovery Officer position, the training and protocols of the NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) have been used in South Australia, where Wendy Perkins operates half-time in the management of the SA Disaster and Recovery Ministries. This is a fast-growing and important asset in the state's response. Chaplains from SADRM were involved in the Adelaide and Pinery Fires' recovery in 2015 and 2016. These chaplaincy resources have also enabled the establishment of chaplaincy networks in the ACT (the ACT DRCN) under the ACT Spiritual Care Council. Dale Chesson from the Northern Synod has been instrumental in establishing the Northern Territory's Emergency Response Chaplaincy Service (ERCS) which will operate under the Northern Territory Council of Churches, and Linda Hamill in Queensland has initiated the DRCN training in Queensland, beginning with the Redlands City Council.

In 2017, the Uniting Church hosted an inaugural national meeting of all state and territory coordinators of disaster recovery chaplaincy networks in the country. Five of seven people present were from the Uniting Church. It is hoped that this group will formalise a national coalition, to build resource sharing, inter-state support and national policy.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/disaster/item/517-list-of-materials-for-specific-times-of-disaster-and-hardship>

## UnitingWorld's Pacific Initiatives

Following Cyclone Winston in the Pacific, Rev. Stephen Robinson assisted UnitingWorld in the support of partner churches in Fiji and Vanuatu. From this time Michael Constable was established as UnitingWorld's Emergency Response Manager, particularly working in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction. From these contacts, the concept of nation-wide ecumenical disaster response chaplaincy networks was birthed. Alongside the UnitingWorld initiative "Navigating the Tide", Stephen has worked with UnitingWorld in assisting the training and establishment of national ecumenical networks in Tonga, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Fiji.

The Uniting Church has consistently pioneered and championed response to people in need as a result of traumatic events. Over time many people have caught and shared the vision of the importance of disaster recovery ministry. This important work, often begun in response to a local need, has now become an integrated and respected ministry across Australia and into the nations of Pacific.

### **The Saltbush Project**

Bronwyn Murphy

In re-visioning rural and remote ministry, the Uniting Church seeks to work with First and Second Peoples – all of whom feel a bond with and a commitment to the land of Australia. The issues are complex. The Uniting Church is made up of many cultures, each holding a different understanding of what land and belonging means, and we struggle to comprehend which response bears most weight for us. In the Uniting Church's commitment to the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and being a Multicultural church, finding a unified understanding of the importance of land and the value of belonging is often fraught with misunderstanding, suspicion and mistrust.

Land is not ours to possess so much as to belong to. Lev 25:23 reminds us that all land belongs to God – and we are here as God's guests. The land hosts our living. It isn't ours by right or by deed of purchase – it is entrusted to human beings as a home or place of belonging by God. Human beings long for home and community, a place of belonging that is safe, welcoming, peaceful, and loving. The land on which we live, in all our tangled joys and heartaches, is not just a random patch of ground, but rather a sacred place of belonging, deeply connecting us to our Creator and to each other. The *Basis of Union* picks this up in paragraph 3 when it speaks about the 'reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.'

Discerning how to sustain remote ministry is one of the challenges faced by the Uniting Church. The issue of land and belonging, whether it is rural, remote or city-centric, is about human community. People are not created to be profit margins or to be fiscally sustainable and isolated individuals; reconciliation and renewal can never abound when people's freedom, spirituality, and sense of belonging is reduced to being able to participate in the economy or who are defined by the abundance or scarcity of what is owned.

Rev Jo Smalbill, Patrol Minister based at Cobar tells the story of one random visit that illustrates the importance of community.

It was a stinking hot day when we went out to visit 75 year old Edna (not her real name). After turning in at her gate, it was another 30 kilometres of dirt road before we arrived at the most derelict home we have ever seen. Edna greeted us with a big smile and a warm welcome and we went inside.

It was when Edna went to make a cuppa that we realised she had no electricity and no fridge. She used a generator when she could afford the fuel, and had a single solar panel to run her 12-volt fridge and the few fairy lights that provided light in her lounge at night. The 12-volt fridge had broken down two years ago and she could not gather the funds together to buy a new one.

I told her we might be able to obtain some funds to buy the fridge for her and she nearly cried. After making some calls and finding out exactly what type of fridge she could run, we were able to obtain money from the Moderators Drought Relief Fund and the company delivered the fridge to the local hotel some 40 kilometres away. Her neighbour kindly offered to pick it up and put it into her kitchen. She called me the next morning so excited. "Oh Jo, I have my fridge, I can finally have ice-cream and real milk again and cheese, all my favourite foods."

She said, "Jo, you and Lou are the best thing that's come to our village in years, no-one took any interest in us before, please don't let the church take you away from us."

Edna has since found out that she has four growths in her lung and needs to make regular calls to the medical centre in town. She often calls in on us for coffee and lunch. Edna is a tough old lady with a big heart and a real community spirit. She organises many local community events and asks us to help out. Her house is falling down around her, she barely scrapes out a little living from the land, but she never complains and won't give up. Oh, and she is so proud to be able to offer us coffee with real milk in it and cheese for our biscuits when we visit.

Edna's story reminds us that we are most fully human when we are in community. Part of that community is our awareness of God and the earth on which we walk. The Rural Ministry Unit and Uniting Mission and Education believe that in Christ, as God's guests on this earth, we can begin to tell a new story as we work out what it means to live on, work, and find a sense of belonging on land that is loved and valued by First and Second Peoples alike.



This new story has taken the name of '**The Saltbush Project**'. In times of extreme hardship, saltbush becomes the farmer's friend. Sturdy and tough, this plant provides

nourishment, feeding stock in times of drought and crop failure. No matter how heavily it is chopped up as feed, saltbush keeps on re-growing - sometimes returning in quirky and interesting shapes – ready to provide nourishment again when needed.

Like saltbush, the people who make up the rural church are also resilient and strong. The rural church is now largely lay-led with active worship, witness and service in most towns and villages.

Since 1985, the Rural Ministry Unit (RMU) has worked to actively support the rural Presbyteries and congregations and develop closer relationships with urban and city partners. As part of its work, the Rural Ministry Unit recognised that rural and remote ministry now stand at a crossroads. No longer can the three presbyteries, patrols and remote ministries be self-sufficient.

There are no “short term fixes” for these issues, nor is it feasible to provide skeleton support which merely serves as continuing life-support. The Saltbush Project seeks to actively re-generate rural and remote ministry – not simply maintain business as usual.

The Presbyteries of New England North West, Riverina and Macquarie Darling in partnership with Congress of NSW & ACT and Uniting Mission and Education have collaborated to approach ministry across the geographical borders, creating 10 Synod Placements consisting of:

- Director of Rural and Remote Ministry. This person will manage and drive the Saltbush Project, but will also help other rural areas identify sustainable ways forward
- Three Remote Chaplains – one position will be designated for an aboriginal person to work in remote aboriginal communities.
- Two Patrol Ministers – located at Broken Hill and Nyngan/Cobar.
- Three Capacity Enriching Ministers who will work with the Presbyteries and existing Ministry agents to help each Presbytery achieve its own strategic goals and missional plans. This will include providing for education, discipleship formation and helping equip new leaders in rural communities.
- The equivalent of one full time position to help with administration.

This new team will be tasked to work closely with the three Western Presbyteries and regional congregations, as well as to work with Congress to reach the more remote areas where the Church has no real structure or continuing influence.

Fresh communication and accountability structures will be put in place; the Rural Ministry Unit itself will be re-designed to ensure each presbytery’s mission plan can be reflected and addressed in the setting of priorities and tasks. The Church Engagement Workers will also be invited to collaborate.

This has not been done before, and we know it to be a work-in-progress, happening in stages over time. The stakeholders are committed to working together to build capacity,

and fund raise as best they can. The 2016 Synod approved this plan, but to this point the funding dilemma has not been solved.

Rev Mark Faulkner has been appointed as the Director and begins this new role in August. We are excited at the future and grateful for Mark's willingness to serve in this role.

Should anyone wish to financially support this new project, please contact Bronwyn Murphy at Uniting Mission & Education [Bronwynm@nwact.uca.org.au](mailto:Bronwynm@nwact.uca.org.au)

We invite your prayers as this project goes forward.



## **The Journey Just Past Ordination**

**– from someone who has always known the Uniting Church**

Danielle Hemsworth-Smith

I have been asked to write a little of what it is like to be ordained and what it is like in the first few months of placement after ordination. However I thought perhaps I would start with a little about me. Hello. My name is Danielle and I was born here in Australia, not too many years after Church Union. I was ordained on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2017 and began placement at Parramatta Centenary Uniting Church in February.

I never expected to be a minister. There was a time when I was a teenager that I knew God called me to some sort of ministry, however I turned it down and thought that would be the only chance I would have. In my mid-twenties I distinctively remember wondering why

anybody would choose this type of life. However when God did come along and firmly told me that the path to Ordained Ministry was indeed my call, I jumped in with everything I have. I am still in many ways surprised and amazed that I find myself here- the Reverend Danielle Hemsworth-Smith: a newly ordained congregational minister in placement in North Parramatta, perhaps the fastest growing residential area in the fastest growing and most culturally diverse city, in the country. But let me step back and start at the beginning, well not really the beginning, but with Ordination itself.

### **The moment of Ordination**

Ordination is a journey. It is something you think about and focus on for years before it happens. For a long time the exact moment when hands are laid upon you is the bright light in the future. By the time you are ordained you have already been to a few Ordination services. You have watched others go before you; your friends and colleagues. People you have both cried and laughed with as you negotiate the path together. You love them, you celebrate with them and you imagine yourself there.

Strangely though, by the time I got there, the moment had completely stopped being about me. It had become about the community around me, the church that made that moment possible, because although I am just one person, my ministry is not. My ministry is only possible because of the church around me. It is only possible because there is a church that sees the call of God in me. I am called by God to Ordination, but I am only one part of the bigger picture of the priesthood of all believers. My place in the church as an Ordained Minister is only possible because of those who have guided me and mentored me and continue to do so. My place is only possible because of those who love and support me. Those who listen to me say stupid things, and pick me up when I fall. My ministry is only possible because of those who have taught me, by allowing me to minister to them; because of those who have allowed me the privilege of seeing the God within them and those who continue to do so.

So when it came to that moment when hands would be laid on me and the church would ordain me through the power of the Holy Spirit, I wanted it to be a celebration of the church as I have experienced it. I really didn't want it to be about me at all. And I hope that I was able to do this. At that moment there were people there from all places. People from when the journey began, even before I heard the call to ministry anew, people from our life outside

the church and those from the broader community. There were those who had sustained and loved us over the three years of formation. There were even some people who I had not met, but were just there because they are part of the church. And finally there were the people who would be there in the future; people from the church community that had called me to be their Minister; people who are now a very big part of my life.

They say home is where the heart is but for me home is in the church, and that is an extraordinarily big and glorious place to call home.

Was there magic in the moment of the bestowing of Ordination through the laying on of hands? Was God in that moment? Absolutely. But most importantly God was clearly in the community of the church that surrounded me; the community that surrounds all of us.

### **On the first few months**

There is no doubt that the joy of Ordination closely followed by Induction gave me a sense of strength and energy to embrace my new Ministry with everything I had. I am someone that sees possibility and likes to imagine and vision BIG and I entered my placement with lots of energy to do exactly that. However the reality is that the church does not always feel the same way and the process of discovering the many layers of everything you need to know to be an effective minister takes time.

To be honest my first couple of weeks could best be described as chaotic. Simple things like discovering the Wi-Fi password at the church, and figuring out who did what seemed to take forever. I discovered very quickly that walking into a ministry placement is not like walking into a normal job where there was someone to hand over the work to you, or alternatively a set of procedures that help you to figure out those essential things you need to know. Instead in ministry, by some mechanism only known to God, you have to somehow figure it out for yourself. And can I say that is not so easy when any one of 80 or so church members could be the only person with a particular piece of information that you need...or in some instances the answer to the question is simply not known as the knowledge went with someone that is no longer there. It is not that people don't want to help you find all you need. They really do. It is just that they don't know where to start either, and like everyone in the modern world they have limited time to help you.

Remembering people's names was a wonderful challenge. It is funny how in those first few weeks people seem to look very similar. (And remember my congregation is incredibly diverse!). Name badges are amazing things, as are congregational rolls that are up-to-date, because if all else fails, you can remember a face and then go to the roll and connect a face with a name. And please when you do your rolls don't forget the children. Remembering their names is just as important as remembering the grown-ups.

Being the long term Minister in one place is also an interesting challenge to get used to. At college we have a variety of placements, all short term and temporary. This is fantastic because we are equipped with all sorts of skills across a variety of different ministry situations. However these short-term experiences don't teach you what it is like to be somewhere long term. I have discovered that there is something about being at the beginning of a long-term placement that means that people look at you very differently in everything you do, compared to the way they perceive you when you are only going to be in a place temporarily. When you are temporary people are generally very affirming. Those that don't like you tend to not say anything because they know that you will go soon. And even though there are one or two of these people who do say something, you can kind of look past it. You can learn from it knowing that it doesn't really matter because you will move on soon. My experience of this new long-term placement is that the responses and feedback I have received are confronting and paradoxical.

I have had it said that I am the answer to prayer, that I bring to the church exactly what it needs, that a change was the only way forward ... and then in the next conversation: 'I don't like the way you do things. We do things differently here, and we do this our way because our way is the way of the Law.'

I have had someone leave because I had the audacity to move a pew so that our children had a place to draw and sit together, and some others left even before I started simply because I am a woman.

Yet at the same time I have had people hug me and cry as they told me how affirmed and valued they feel through my words for the first time as a Christian. I have had new people to the congregation stay because they feel the congregation values the children they bring with

them. I have had people tell me that for the first time they feel empowered to speak out as part of the congregation. I have had the absolute wonder of people telling me that, yes, I am different to what the congregation is used to, but that is ok, because they can see that I am the right person for this place right now.

It is an incredible and at times overwhelming tension to get my head around. However as the weeks pass, and people begin to get used to me and I to them, and I slowly begin to uncover the layers of history that makes this community all that it is, we slowly begin to trust each other. And the paradox grows somewhat less.

### **So where to from here ?**

I feel overwhelmed with gratitude at the Church's discernment that God calls me to be the Minister at Parramatta Centenary Uniting Church. The people in this place are extraordinary and the opportunity that the growing city around us presents for us to bring the Good News of God is beyond anything that we could imagine. I truly feel that this is the right place for me right now.

I am very aware that I could not have made it through the last four months without the support of my colleagues and friends in the wider church as well as the affirmation from many of the wonderful people in my new congregation. There is nothing better than a coffee and a safe place to rest your weary bones. I also know that my family are my strength. Coming home to them every day is everything. They are a gift from God that I could not be without.

I do not know what the future holds, however I think whatever it is will be pretty exciting. I also know that as a community of people inspired by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit we, who are part of Parramatta Centenary Uniting Church, will be amazing. God through Christ will guide our way, just as God guides yours.

## **Making Courageous and Wise Decisions**

Keith Hamilton

John F. Kennedy, when a USA Senator in 1955, wrote a book titled *Profiles in Courage*. For this he won a Pulitzer Prize. He modelled the book on one by Winston Churchill, *Great*

*Contemporaries*, which was highly regarded in the late 1930's and 1940's. Both books spoke about leaders and wisdom and making courageous decisions.

Near the end of his book, Kennedy wrote the following:

Of course, the acts of courage described in this book would be more inspiring and would shine more with the traditional lustre of hero-worship if we assumed that each one forgot wholly about themselves and their dedication to higher principles. It is when the politician loves neither the public good nor themselves, or when their love for themselves is limited and is satisfied by the trappings of office, that the public interest is badly served. And it is when their regard for themselves is so high that their own self-respect demands they follow the path of courage and conscience that all benefit. P 218

. . . It is not because they loved the public better than themselves. On the contrary it was precisely because they did love themselves – because each one's need to maintain their own respect for themselves was more important to them than their popularity with others – because their desire to win or maintain a reputation for integrity and courage was stronger than their desire to maintain their office – because their conscience, their personal stand of ethics, their integrity or morality, call it what you will – was stronger than the pressures of public disapproval - because their faith that this course was the best one, and would ultimately be vindicated, outweighed their fear of public reprisal. P 219

. . . Some demonstrated courage through their unyielding devotion to absolute principle. Others demonstrated courage through their acceptance of compromise, through their advocacy of conciliation, through their willingness to replace conflict with cooperation. P 221

. . . In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices one faces if one follows their conscience – the loss of friends, fortune, contentment, even the esteem of their fellows – each one must decide for themselves the course they will follow. The stories of past courage can define that ingredient – they can teach, they can offer hope, they can provide inspiration. But they cannot supply courage itself. For this each one must look into their own soul. P 225

It struck a chord. Not only did Kennedy write about courageous leadership, he also lived it. Such that, the JFK Library continues to this day to make an annual Profile in Courage Award to the US political leader who demonstrates courageous leadership, even at their own political expense.

For me, making courageous and wise decisions is making decisions that may not be popular, invariably are risky, yet always wise. Plato said a good city and good leaders are leaders who have the qualities of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), courage, self-discipline, and who do the right and just thing. Courageous leadership is not foolish leadership, even if it is costly leadership. What I mean by that is courageous leadership counts the cost, weighs up the risks and makes a decision and sets a course. Jesus' decision to go to Jerusalem, to the cross, may seem foolish from the vantage point of a long life, but it was weighed up, and it was the wise thing to do. God's foolishness to our eyes is in actuality greater wisdom than our greatest wisdom.

A lived example from Parramatta Mission is Wesley Apartments.

In 2008 a group of us from the Leigh Memorial congregation of Parramatta Mission were on a bus to Palm Beach, when one opened the newspaper with the quip, "Which property shall

we buy today.” And there in the property section was a block of apartments for sale at Westmead, on the corner directly opposite the front door of the Children’s Hospital. We didn’t know for what purpose we would use the apartments, but we knew immediately that the Uniting Church should have a presence there. Before we got to Palm Beach we had decided to purchase the property. Parramatta Mission had enough for a deposit, and we borrowed the balance of the 1.3 million to purchase. About a month later a bus load of another group of PM people, this time from the Couples and Friends Club, travelled on their annual bus holiday, that year to the Riverina. While there they heard about the plight of Matthew Whiting, a nine year old boy who had crashed a car on the farm while driving to the bus stop. He was resuscitated nine times between the accident site and hospital. Our people took up a collection to help the family. When they arrived home they discovered that Matthew and his mum Lisa had been helicoptered to Canberra then to Westmead. Two of the group started visiting them in hospital. Each week they would report to the congregation what was happening. Matthew had multiple operations, including removal of part of the skull to allow the brain to swell, and then contract. Lisa slept beside Matthew for 5 months in a recliner chair.

We knew after the first week what we had to do with the Westmead building. We borrowed another million dollars and renovated it inside to four star standard and outside to be contemporary. We had no idea what the demand would be. For the first two years after purchase until opening, we did not have an income from the property to meet the repayments and had to use other resources. We even separately titled each of the six apartments so that if the project did not work, we could sell an individual apartment. Since we opened Wesley Apartments in March 2010, the apartments have been full with families with a child at the hospital, and even with waiting lists of up to 20 families. Families are 30 seconds away from the ward. Each of the six two bedroom apartments is fully furnished to be a home away from home. The average stay is 59 days, but some families have lived there up to two years. For some children their first two years of life have been at Wesley Apartments.

They come from all over Australia and even the Pacific. Families pay a nominal amount, remembering that invariably they are still paying rent or mortgage on the family home somewhere else. We still owe in excess of 1.5 million dollars, and gradually that is being reduced. Countless people have made donations, and others have given time to plant gardens, and to create a communal area, including a barbeque, lounge and safe children’s play area.

The Westmead congregation provide welcome packs to get people through the first 24 hours. Members of our Leigh Memorial congregation provide activity packs for siblings of children in the hospital. From day one before we had an income, a member of staff has been employed to welcome families when they arrive, and give assistance with such things as directions to local shops, and other matters to make the arrival for families who are in great distress as smooth as possible. Funds are raised to provide additional benevolent support for families, depending upon their needs.

Even though we have felt guided by the Living God in our midst, it was no less a courageous and wise decision, that involved many decisions by a large group people – our three congregations and church council, and our staff - to purchase and open Wesley Apartments.

Parramatta Mission uses three criteria to make decisions: Does it align with our vision: a community transforming lives? Does it align with our values: grace, inclusion, dignity, faith and hope? How will it affect the economic, social and environmental sustainability of Parramatta Mission? These three criteria provide a framework to make courageous and wise decisions.

# **MINISTERING IN THE UCA**

by Haloti Kailahi

## **Australia: A New Home**

I arrived in Australia from Tonga in early 1983 after finishing Form 7 (University of South Pacific Preparation Foundational Level) at Tupou High School. When I arrived, I studied a Bachelor's degree in Economics at Macquarie University. I enjoyed the university life very much, perhaps too much at times. Luckily for me, my older brother was already at Macquarie University, studying his Master's degree in Education. Also, there were many Pacific Islander students that made me feel at home. However, I missed my mother terribly. She was a widow and a single parent to nine children after the death of my father in 1973. She would remind me of my father's wishes for all children to pursue education to the highest of our ability. I quickly learnt to adapt to the new environment and settled into the Australian way of life quickly which is much different from the island of Tonga. I have benefited tremendously from this land that I now call home. I am sure I feel the same as many people who have come from overseas. I have enjoyed the hospitality of this new land of hope and opportunity and I give thanks to God.

## **UCA: the call**

The Uniting Church in Australia is the only church I have known and attended since I came here. As a member of the Free Wesleyan Methodist Church of Tonga it was only natural for me to join the UCA. I found Ryde Wesley Uniting Church as the closest church to me at the time where other Tongan friends were attending. After marrying my wife Katalina Tavo, also from Tonga, we attended Ryde Wesley Uniting Church and our children were baptized there too. During my time at Ryde, I became a lay preacher. At the time of my period of discernment, I was the steward or local pastor of the congregation as well as being an active member of the combined Top Ryde and West Ryde church council in 2005. The Tongan language service members at Top Ryde decided to become full members of the Ryde Uniting Church congregation before then which marked another peg in the sand for a strong partnership to the UCA and commitment to the ethos of the Uniting Church.

Rev. Sione Alo Fakahua and Rev. Filimone Oliveti encouraged me to consider ordained ministry for a while, as well as others like Rev. Ivan Roberts and Rev. Hugh Park. I also received tremendous support from other members of the church at large during that time. I finally decided to begin my Period of Discernment under the guidance of Sydney North Presbytery. I found myself in a dark space of doubt and fear of the unknown. I continued to pray hard about it and wrestled with this calling on my life. I thought, I was already an active lay leader in the congregation and the local steward and perhaps that should be enough for me.

At the height of my career, why change? Why go into a vocation that I may not enjoy or be able to fulfill? Years before this decision, my mother urged me constantly to follow my father's footsteps and work for the church and to seriously consider ordained ministry. Sometimes I tried to avoid talking to my mother because she would always make ministry a topic of the conversation. Little did she know that ordained ministry was the last thing I wanted to do so I could continue the family tradition. I felt that tradition would have been the wrong reason for me to do it anyway. I wanted to hear God's voice clearly calling me. That call came in May 2005 when my whole family took a vacation to the USA to Disneyland. On this trip, I heard God's voice calling me to come, saying that he would like to use me to make

disciples of all nations and baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19). I encountered Jesus Christ on that journey. I sincerely experienced the Damascus journey moment where my heart was on fire and my eyes were opened. I found myself in a place within me that I had never been there before. I discovered a new person within me and my inner being was turned inside out. I opened my eyes and heart to God and said, "Here I am God. I am ready".

As mentioned above, I was at the top of my employment career with a secure income working as a business executive within a global company. It could not have come at a worse time for me to choose. In addition, I knew my family's finance and lifestyle will be severely compromised. Well, after discerning God's call on my life and with the great support of my family, I accepted the call and started the process. After being accepted as a candidate for the Minister of the Word, I started my theological study in 2008 together with my Practical Formation. I immersed myself in both formation and the formal study requirement. I moved my family to North Parramatta and lived in the student residential units. It was the best decision I made in preparing me and my family for the ordained ministry - by leaving the comfort of our own home to live in a different location and making friends with new people thus forming a new community. I valued the fellowship and support of our neighbours when residing with colleagues and staff on-site. After completing my theological study, I was then ordained in 2011 at Eastwood UCA.

### **Belmont and Oatley - Tale of two churches**

I immediately received a call from St Luke's Belmont in the Lake Macquarie region of NSW, the land of the Awabakal aboriginal people. I started my very first placement there in the same year in 2011. We had a wonderful time there and were sustained by the love, care and grace of the congregation members and the whole community. It was very hard for us though to leave Belmont after nearly five years but I knew deep down in my heart that the nature of the Ordained ministry is that, sooner or later, we must move on to another placement.

In November 2015, I accepted a priority call to serve Oatley Uniting Church in the south of Sydney, near the Georges River. I said, "yes Lord here I am, send me". Once again, I am so grateful for the hospitality and kindness shown by the people of Oatley Uniting Church. The congregation celebrated its centenary in 2013 and descendants of founding members are still worshipping at Oatley. Yes, I found a new community and I am at home just with a new postcode.

The church is very active in fostering and developing stronger relationships with our ecumenical churches and partners. Christian churches from various denominations at Oatley host a big Christmas Carols in the park each year with fireworks that attract the local community at large. The congregation is very active and supportive of teaching scripture in schools, both primary and secondary. We continue to engage with the community by hosting market stalls within the church property and using our halls for quilt displays and other children activities during The Lion's festival in October each year. The congregation has several fellowship groups: - ladies fellowship, adult fellowship, connect groups, four bible studies group, prayer group, a "few good men" cafe group and many more.

Oatley Uniting Church is very generous and very supportive of various ministries such as the Exodus Foundation, overseas missions and about twenty other worthy charities. Through our Op shop ministry, we distributed more than \$65k in total to several ministries each year

making a significant difference to other people lives. These extra funding are on top of the members' donation to Uniting Church's various fund giving projects.

The church council is trying to listen to the will of God for Oatley Uniting Church. At our next congregational meeting, the whole congregation will be invited to pick and choose the pre-chosen ministry of interest that might inspire them. If they do not find something they are so passionate about in the list of existing ministries then they are free to start one or suggest one.

We are very much aware that for the vision to work, it is not about a solo effort by the Minister or a select few but a whole team, the work of the whole congregation to make the dream and vision work. It is about every person ministry. Young adults, families and children's ministry are beginning to take shape and although it has been a slow journey, we feel much more blessed now with the leaderships provided by those who volunteer.

It is God's church and we will continue to offer and receive, share and believe that the life-giving and care-loving ministry of Christ is available to all people in the community and will continue even after my call to the next placement.

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