

# GREVILLEA

May, 2012

Welcome to the nineteenth 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 **Ministry – touching all of life.**

I have invited people from different backgrounds and perspectives to write on this subject. Geoff Stevenson raises questions about ministry and mission concluding with what North mead Uniting Church is fostering. Kathy Periera writes about the experiences of people serving through UnitingWorld. Keith Hamilton writes out of his leadership role with Parramatta Mission. There is an article on the School of Discipleship and what some young adults have become involved in. Finally there are some recommended books I have heard about from different people in the networks I am in contact with such as the Mission and Evangelism network.

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.

Grace and peace

Chris Walker

## Questions about Ministry and Mission

Geoff Stevenson, Northmead Uniting Church

A young man from our congregation came up and wanted to talk with me. I had previously heard him speak about his conversion as a teenager, newly arrived in Australia, and then his growth in faith. He wanted to know about ministry and where he could be in ministry. He very clearly didn't feel called to ordination but wanted to engage in 'significant' ministry. We talked a bit and he was interested in music and worship. He related well to young people but wasn't sure he wanted to do youth work. We talked and eventually he entered into a mentoring relationship with an older, wiser member of the congregation. They explored possibilities and reflected on things he did. That process, important as it was, didn't easily provide him with the answer. Where could he, a husband and father who operated his own business, engage in ministry that felt deep and meaningful and was like Jesus?

A group of young people discussing Jesus' proclamation about God's Kingdom and what it was about asked what they could do that reflected what Jesus was on about in the world. What, indeed? Some were involved in children's and youth ministry and music and worship but they knew there was something more from what they heard in Jesus' story. What could they do to help the poor beyond fund-raising or giving money? What could they do for the homeless that would make a difference? What could they do for the developing world and the immense problems of struggling brothers and sisters across the world? When they explored a few possibilities they found they could help in a soup kitchen but couldn't get too close to the clients because 'they weren't trained'. They couldn't really work with the homeless because they didn't know what to do or how to break the bonds of poverty. On one hand the issues were too big and they too 'small' and on the other they weren't trained, they didn't have the professional training to engage with people who experience health, mental health, poverty or other issues.

In other words, these people were enthusiastic to follow Jesus into life-transforming ministry that engaged with the issues of poverty, justice and the things Jesus seemed to do. The problem was/is that in the midst of regular church, family and community life such possibilities aren't easy to access. Sometimes it is the vast gulf between the lives we live and the requirements of living in a different way to embrace Jesus' life that is the problem – it can turn everything upside down or demand radical changes that are too big a leap. Often these decisions don't belong to 'me' alone but affect other family or congregation members. They also encountered the very real issue of the professionalization of ministry roles – whether within the church structures where there is often a hierarchy of roles or within other ministry organisations where professional training in welfare, counselling and so on is required. Where can ordinary people express the love of God, of Jesus, in ways that make a difference in the world around? How can they participate in the big issues of life and world?

The issue for me is what are the possibilities for ministry for the people in our congregations? Where do people go when they want to be in ministry? How do I place them, send them or organise them? It isn't as difficult if they feel called in a particular way that allows them to give their whole life and vocation to a particular ministry - ordination, counselling, mission work overseas, administration... We can see pathways in church organisations for those who are open in this way but what about those who have other

work, their families and settled lives in their community and want to think about ministry from within this perspective? We can look at their work and talk about how it might be done for the sake of God's Kingdom or taking up some of the roles in congregations but that isn't always enough.

In local congregations the usual outlets for ministry are serving on committees, music and worship, leading children and young people's groups, seniors activities, pastoral care, administration and other similar possibilities that emerge from time to time. These things are important and are often central to our life as a church but they aren't all that the church is about. In a large congregation it may become more difficult for some people to access some of these roles as there are only so many musicians etc that can be used. Not everyone is called to work with youth groups and those who do may be confronted by the very situation I had with the young man who wants to be in ministry and I don't know where or how to help him.

The theology of the Uniting Church, perhaps more than some other churches, opens people up to broader mission and justice and often deals with some big themes of life and the world. When people want to engage with these in a more deliberate manner, what do they do? When people want to be involved in the kind of ministry that we keep telling them that Jesus did, when they want to respond to the challenge to follow Jesus and be part of the transforming Kingdom of God, where do they go? What do they do? How do we open ministry up to lay leadership and be, together, the people of God in the world?

Perhaps another angle on the question I am raising is how we live the life of Christ in contemporary society, amidst all the struggles and realities of home, work, study and so on. Where does discipleship and following Jesus fit into contemporary society? Can we be faithful disciples of Jesus who also have 'normal' lives? Is discipleship implicit in our lives, how we live and what we do or an additional extra that happens on top of ordinary life? Is ministry only that which happens through the church/congregation or are there avenues for ministry to happen beyond the congregation but with congregational support and resourcing - for individuals and groups? If so, how do we balance the institutional, organisational requirements of the church with the mission of the church in the world? What might the role of ordained ministers and other professionals be in facilitating and nurturing the mission of the church?

When we begin to engage missionally with the world, we discover that there are many groups around us that share some common values. Is it reasonable and responsible, to the mission of God's Kingdom, to engage with other groups who aren't Christian, to work for the common good? Is it better to pool resources with other people or groups and work together with some shared values, than go it alone because they aren't Christian? If we do work together, how can we ensure our Christian values and missional calling will be held up and valued?

A significant issue in contemporary society is individualism and the resulting isolation. I find that alone I cannot achieve much and the forces of society and culture work against me. It is only when I am joined to others and we work together that we can encourage each other in the radical ways of Jesus and can begin to explore mission. Such joining together requires trust and understanding of each other and it takes time to build such relationships. Our fast-paced lives don't always allow for these relationships to develop. One of the things we are trying to do in our congregation and across our region (zone) of our presbytery is to develop relationships with each other – to take time to talk to one another and understand each other, to listen to what drives us, what we feel passionate about, what are our

struggles, hopes and joys. As we develop these relationships possibilities emerge that take us into more significant opportunities in ministry and mission.

We have also connected to other organisations so that we don't have start from scratch or reinvent the wheel. World Vision co-ordinates an excellent mentoring program that works between congregations and the local primary school, called Kids Hope Aus. It provides resourcing and training for local co-ordinators to run so that mentors can work in schools to support struggling children. The Lent Event program has enabled us to connect with thousands of other people across the UCA to learn from and support people across the developing world through UnitingWorld. Together there are possibilities for us to achieve what alone we cannot. I have discovered that there is greater potential for groups of people to go deeper and connect more deeply with particular communities in the developing world and share mutual ministry through UnitingWorld. We can't and don't have to do it alone but in relationship with others we can work together and go further, offering mutual support and encouragement.

Our congregation has joined the Sydney Alliance and is beginning to see possibilities for working with other groups in our community and beyond to achieve the bigger things we believe in and share in common with other organisations. In the Sydney Alliance there is mutual respect for each of the organisations and what we bring from our faith is valued. Through the Sydney Alliance we are able to link in at various levels, from local initiatives through to Sydney wide 'big' initiatives that we could not possibly hope to do anything about alone.

At local level, we have also seen various people explore the particular things that interest them personally and gather other interested people around them to do something together. Sometimes these are larger and sometimes smaller. We have people interested in meditation who have begun to meet together and have opened the group to the community. Through Christian meditation and the conversations that ensue in the group, relationships develop, spirituality deepens and mutual ministry evolves. In music, a few like-minded people got together and formed a jazz band. A mutual enjoyment in making music together has enabled this group to perform and raise money for people in our community and across the world who need a hand up. It also brings people together for a fun and enjoyable evening – they come into the church, hear about mission work and enjoy music and a good time. It is a connection with God, justice, other people and a sense of contributing to that which is good and positive in life.

I hope that the questions I wrestle with may provoke some reflection within you and that together we may be able to create new ways of serving God and the world and encouraging others within our congregations to participate in ministry and mission in the way of Jesus.

## **“We're all Wontok in Christ”**

Kathy Pereira, UnitingWorld

It started out as a collision of worldviews and became an image that would stay with me over the next two weeks as I worked with our UCA partners in the United Church of Papua New

Guinea. It's an image that reminds me of what ministry is like when we share day to day lives with our overseas partners. It's an image that has stayed with me ever since.

On the flight to Port Moresby I was seated beside a young woman who had a beautiful traditional, Highlands billum, a type of local string bag. Poking out of it was a white iMac!

How strange, one of the icons of western "civilisation" sticking out of one of PNG's most recognisable and traditional PNG artefacts. It seemed to say it all really. Cross-cultural ministry is complex, sometimes downright confusing and full of contrasts. We see wealth and opportunity side by side with traditional village subsistence life and social structures. If ministry is to be meaningful it must touch all of life. Not just billums or iMacs but both and more.

Steven Bevans, a leading contemporary missiologist, speaks about mission as "word, deed and witness". I regularly have the opportunity to share with the remarkable UCA people who serve as UnitingWorld volunteers in our 36 overseas partner churches. Every time I am reminded that we can preach the Word as much as we like, we can do good deeds with deep conviction, but if our daily life witness is out of tune with these they will lose their potency. The message that Christ ushered in, that the Kingdom of God is here and now, challenges us to real life engagement. Ministry is about living out our faith with our sleeves rolled up!

This kind of ministry touches local people living day to day real lives at the same time as you and I live ours. And if we look hard enough we can see a space where "their ministry" can become "our ministry".

HIV/AIDS continues to be an extraordinary challenge for many of our overseas friends. The woman with the iMac in her billum was an HIV/AIDS researcher with the Clinton Foundation. She told me that the rate of testing for HIV in PNG is only increasing ever so slowly and that official statistics are only based on those tested. She suspects HIV is widespread in her country and if ever they were able to get real statistics they might easily mimic those in Africa.

The United Church in PNG supports an HIV/AIDS trainer, Joe. Standing about 6'3" tall and solid, Joe is well known as someone who has turned his life around. As he leads workshops with groups of young adults, the main emphasis is on dispelling untruths about HIV and encouraging people to be tested. It's a clear message. Abstinence, testing, use of antiretrovirals, safe living.

But access to medical care when you live in a remote community is almost impossible. In PNG, people living with HIV have government and church supported testing programs and access to anti-retroviral medications. But these need to be taken regularly and require frequent check-ups. What do you do if your only dispensary is 40kms from where you live? Or even on another island?

Meet UnitingWorld's Rev Lucille (Lu) Piper. She's been serving the UCPNG by refurbishing and constructing over 20 health clinics and outposts in the Papuan Islands region. Lu's work reflects her deep commitment to God, the people of PNG and her tenacity! She orders hardware supplies and water tanks and carries them across open seas on small boats to remote islands where there are no builders or plumbers! Lu has become a "Jill of all trades" and has a reputation as someone who can make things happen.

As a result of the efforts of Lu and Joe and their teams, many people in PNG now have access to information and medical care that was impossible before. Ministry with its sleeves rolled up....ministry touching all of life and addressing even those subjects that seem taboo.

Sometimes, being engaged in ministry can challenge us to action in places we might not normally go. When we open our eyes to the world around us we can see some terrible things. Poverty, inequity, injustices. And if I'm honest, many of the things I take for granted as my "rights" contribute to these. How does a Christian respond when we see real people, friends sometimes in our partner church communities, struggling to be heard?

I'm reminded of our friends in the Kiribati Protestant Church for whom life is an ever-looming challenge. Set less than 3metres above sea level at its highest point, this tiny archipelago nation daily confronts the challenge of adapting to ever increasing king tides and rising sea levels. Villages have already been swamped and people moved to higher ground. And the church is trying to find God in the midst of this.

Bera (not her real name) is a young mother living in a traditional platform sago hut with her husband and 2 children. Subsistence life is no longer an option for them. The land simply will not sustain agriculture. Their land is regularly swamped by salt water and they have to move out to share a relative's home until it subsides. Water-borne disease is on the increase and sanitation and hygiene are almost impossible to manage.

Through UnitingWorld Experience, Wendy Flahive has chosen to visit as a volunteer nurse educator. Wendy is spending 3 months in Kiribati to assist women with preventative health management, nutrition and child care workshops. Not only does this provide much wanted information and skills for local women, it also says in a tangible way "we care, we are here in

solidarity with you and share your struggle". Together with a UnitingWorld campaign to provide climate change education and advocacy desks across our Pacific partner churches including Kiribati, we find ourselves yet again engaged in ministry "with its sleeves rolled up".

Sometimes ministry means touching the unlovely. Let me explain....

A man mentally unstable lived in a small PNG village. He would sit on the side of the road and crying out about wanting food. He was dirty, hair all messed up; he even smelled bad! People in the town would cross the road, rather than walk near him. He sat there for a number of days.

One day a member of our partner church, "Samson", went down and took him some food. The man quietened down a bit. The next day he was crying out again. Samson gave him more food. Eventually, as he built the man's trust, Samson brought the man to his home where he and Miriam looked after him.

They took him to the pastor's house. The pastor prayed with him but said he was too dirty and could not stay. So Samson and Miriam brought him back, showered him and cleaned him up. The man is getting better. He comes to Samson's home regularly and is much improved. His name is Benjamin.

Samson's relatives in the village said "He's not your wontok, not from our village. Why are you helping him? You are bringing shame on us. Let his own people look after him. See – even they won't do it".

Samson's reply was, "Don't you understand? We're all wontok in Christ"

That is ministry that touches all of life. It is not about me or about you but about "us". With privilege comes responsibility. Are we willing to roll our sleeves up and get involved?

If we are, there are many opportunities to serve for anything between 3 months and 3 years with one of our overseas partners. UnitingWorld Experience has over 150 people each year offering their time and resources to do just this. Inevitably, they return telling us they have been given far more by their host communities than they could ever share! The experience of being in community in a place that sees the world and, dare I say, God differently can be powerfully enriching for all.

UnitingWorld's overseas partners in Asia, the Pacific and Africa need teachers, teacher assistants (no experience necessary), administrators, office workers, people with financial skills, tradespeople, librarians, theologians, community workers and much more. Your love and skills might be just what they're looking for!

Perhaps you can't go for a longer time but are keen to see what our overseas partner churches are doing? UnitingWorld has six InSolidarity Exposure visits taking place this year led by our staff or expert volunteers. You are welcome to be part of these visits to Kiribati, India, West Timor, Mongolia, Zambia and Zimbabwe and Tonga and connect with some of the people and projects the UCA is supporting.

Word, Deed and Witness, ministry that touches all of life. It's an invitation to engage, not just go through the motions of living. To stand up as people of God, roll up our sleeves and enter into the reality of being "wontok in Christ".

We would love to speak with you some more about ways of getting involved. Please feel free to contact UnitingWorld (0282674267) or me (0437699693 or [kathyp@unitingworld.org.au](mailto:kathyp@unitingworld.org.au) if you would like to find out more.

## **Two way relationships between Parish Missions and Suburban and Rural Congregations**

Keith Hamilton, Parramatta Mission

Parish missions have always had, continue to do so, and always should have two-way relationships with suburban and rural congregations.

This paper briefly explores the background to parish missions, and their horizontal relationships with the rest of the church, then and now. While we should not be trapped by the past, it is always useful to be aware of our history. Such understanding can help us to face contemporary situations. Such is the situation with parish missions engaging with other congregations.

Parish missions are different to UnitingCare. UnitingCare connects directly with the UCA through the Synod. Parish Missions are congregations and connect with the church through the Presbytery.

Parish missions began in the nineteenth century. They are a response to the industrial revolution influence on modern cities. As the industrial revolution developed, the middle classes moved out of city centres and into suburbs. The 'poor' then tendered to move into the city centres close to work and cheap housing in a market downturn. Many city churches that

had become middle class through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, became in the resultant shift in society with the move to the suburbs, a shift from being comfortably full to uncomfortably empty. Denominations, such as the Methodist church were then faced with the agonising situation of having uneconomic churches with dwindling congregations in city centres. Maybe they should close, sell up and relocate.

The first Parish Missions were in English cities, such as Manchester and Bristol. The first in Australia was in Sydney. Briefly, they came about in Australia in this way.

William Taylor was an evangelist who transformed every congregation in which he ministered, from decline into vibrant and thriving congregations. He was sent against his will, by the Methodist Conference to York Street Methodist Church. Within a year the challenge of the Annual Conference had been turned around from closure of the building because of lack of numbers, to enlarging the church because it was now too small to fit in the expanding congregation.

Taylor coined the name Central Methodist Mission or CMM. He coined a slogan, “A living Christ for a dying world.” He introduced pink posters promoting events of the church.

His starting point was worship – prayer - and this led to evangelism. An organ was put on a sully and led around the streets, with Taylor singing, gathering a crowd of people who would follow back to the church for the service followed by the class meeting in the back room. It was there that people were converted. Quickly it became apparent that the people who were moving into the city centres where there was now cheaper housing and work, were the poor, homeless, destitute, deserted wives and children, orphans, prostitutes, alcoholics, drug addicted, and people with mental illnesses. So community service programs commenced to meet this social need. This phenomena still features today.

Parish missions have continued this work ever since. They refine the worship, witness and service theology of the *Basis of Union*, to worship, evangelism, and multi-faceted community service programs. The segments influenced by the first parish missions.

There was another important aspect of William Taylor that is often overlooked. Taylor had the vision that the parish mission would be in a two way relationship with congregations. He saw parish missions as one of the doorways into the church, through which people might then become part of a suburban or rural congregation, or a newly converted tourist might return to their country and link up with a local church.

Taylor always thought that parish missions, being among the poor, would tend to have a higher proportion of poor in their congregation. The parish mission would need financial and voluntary support of other congregations to continue the work in the city centre.

Unfortunately the Methodist Conference never understood this part of Taylor’s vision, yet it is very important.

Today parish missions, while attending to the poor and socially excluded in city centres, tend to interact with people right across the social spectrum, from the poor and homeless to the rich and even powerful such as large corporations and Government. The need to interact and the opportunities to do so with suburban and rural congregations is no less important today than in 1884.

Parramatta Mission (PM) provides breakfast and lunch Monday to Friday. Two case workers and a cook are employed. The rest are volunteers. Every day, we require the help of many volunteers to operate our breakfast and lunches and the other services we provide, such as legal assistance, 'general', gambling and financial counselling and other forms of assistance. Many large businesses allow staff two paid volunteering days each year, and every day we have such staff at PM.

A group of men from West Epping UC provide a regular BBQ dinner and opportunity to talk with the men at Hope Hostel. Others provide mentoring and help at Parra House – our youth crisis refuge. We always have need for female volunteers at Thelma Brown Cottage for women and children escaping domestic violence.

In 2011 and again in 2012, West Epping UC held 'March into Mission' in early March, when they suspended their Sunday morning services and teams of people volunteered on projects at a number of organisations, including Parramatta Mission. In 2011, one group painted the stairwell at Thelma Brown Cottage. Another set up a garden and had a BBQ at Hope Hostel. Another team repaired a fence at Kelly Cottages, our single women's accommodation. In 2012, a room at Thelma Brown Cottage was fitted out and painted and at Kelly's cottage, the units were painted and garden maintenance undertaken.

The Westmead congregation of Parramatta Mission hold regular Saturday morning BBQ's for families staying at our Wesley Apartments. Wesley Apartments provides accommodation for families from all over Australia and the Pacific who have a child at Westmead Children's Hospital.

From time to time we have need for renovations of houses and bedsits used for accommodation for one of our programs. Often corporates send a team of staff with paint and other equipment to renovate one of our properties.

Parramatta Mission could not function without the support and interaction of many people, organisations, churches, governments, individuals, who give money or time and energy to partner with us. This is also true of every parish mission. Volunteers provide leadership on our Board and on the various committees of the Mission. Rural and suburban congregations send donations of food, money, clothes, blankets, and volunteers who assist the work of Parramatta Mission.

Volunteering is always a two-way experience. Volunteering, as well as giving of donations, not only assists the parish missions, it is also as satisfying, fulfilling and transforming for those who give as it is for those who receive. Volunteering provides opportunities to express the faith in practical ways and to become aware of not only the great needs in the world, but also of some of the ways God is working in and through people as those needs are addressed.

William Taylor's vision of two-way relationships between parish missions and the surrounding congregations, both suburban and rural, is as relevant and perhaps more apparent today than when he first began back in 1884.

## School of Discipleship

This year's School of Discipleship will be held on July 6–9, 2012 at the Naamaroo Conference Centre (near Chatswood). The Keynote Speaker will be Dr Jeff Aernie who teaches New Testament at the United Theological College. Originally from Midwest USA, he has taught biblical studies courses in both the USA and the UK having obtained his PhD from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He is particularly interested in the intersection between the study of the New Testament and the life of discipleship.

What is the School of Discipleship? If you look up the website you will find the following.

“The School of Discipleship (SOD) is exactly that, a ‘school’ where we come to learn, to be challenged and nurtured, to know deeper levels of understanding in our Christian lives. It is a reflective time for personal and movement renewal, a discipleship school, an alternative place for building biblical and political literacy. It is simply an inspired educational space—a confessional space—for renewing the church and our lives in Christ. For anyone who has ever longed for more connection to the Radical Discipleship movement in Australia, to join with kindred spirits, and for the opportunity to study both Scripture and society in the midst of community and worship, SOD is where you will find it.

SOD is not about new techniques: it is rather about fresh commitments. It is a place where we straddle the theological colleges, our churches, and the world of our student and professional lives. This school is a time of re-orientation and renewal—so enjoy it! It is where we come together to learn and pray, and in the midst of worship respond to the call and claims of the Trinity of God.”

The School of Discipleship has not only keynote speakers, but also electives, small groups and community times. Over the few days people mix with others serious about discipleship and develop relationships. They are enabled to deepen their biblical and theological understanding and given insights into how to work for reconciliation, justice and peace in the world following the way of Jesus Christ.

The first School of Discipleship was held in Canberra in 2004 with theologian Rev. Dr. Thorwald Lorenzen who wrote *Resurrection and Discipleship* as the keynote speaker. In the following years, School of Discipleship has continued to be blessed with many great speakers including: Ched Myers best known for his book *Binding the Strong Man – a Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, Elaine Enns of Bartimaeus Ministries which focuses on

restorative justice, Daniel Smith–Christopher an engaging biblical scholar, David Batstone head of the organisation *Not for Sale* which seeks to address the issue of human trafficking, and theologian Ben Myers whose blog *Faith and Theology* is the most visited one of its kind.

Young adults are stimulated by the School of Discipleship to put into practice the radical discipleship talked about and practiced by people they come in contact with. Some have gone on to serve in overseas positions using their gifts and skills, one now works for *Not for Sale*, some have become mission workers alongside chaplains in universities, and some have heard the call to candidate for ordained ministry.

The School of Discipleship is one means of people deepening their discipleship and seeking to discern where God might lead them to serve God's mission in the world.

## **Recommended Reading**

Peter Block, *The Answer to How is Yes*

Walter Bruegemann, *Journey to the Common Good*

Stephen Burns, *Pilgrim People: An Invitation to Worship in the Uniting Church*

Stephen Croft (editor), *Mission Shaped Questions*

Andrew Davison & Alison Milbank, *For the Parish*

David Fergusson, *Faith and its Critics*

Michael Frost, *Road to Missional*

David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions*

Dave Male (editor), *Pioneers for Life*

Will Mancini, *Church Unique*

David. Rock, *Quiet Leadership*

Christopher C. Walker (editor), *Building on the Basis: Papers from the Uniting Church in Australia, 2000-2011*

N. T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*