



National Matters

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



From the General Secretary

2008 sees the cycle of Assembly life turn from looking back to the 11th Assembly to looking forward to the 12th Assembly in Sydney, July 2009. This orientation of our gaze is reflected in the framework within which this report is presented. The theme for the 12th Assembly is 'Living Water, Thirsty Land'.

This theme has been enthusiastically embraced by the Assembly Standing Committee and staff, because the metaphor acknowledges the needs of our world and positively affirms the contribution of the gospel and the church to respond to the needs of our world.

I hope that, as you read this report of the work of the Assembly, you will be greatly encouraged to see the way that you, through this Council of the church, have been partnering with God in bringing water to a thirsty land.

The image captures the great Biblical themes of renewal – both personal and social; the centrality of Christ - the living water; environmental restoration; new life through baptism; salvation through water and so much more. I am certain that you will find many aspects of this rich image present in the reports from the various agencies and committees of the Assembly that are included in *National Matters*.

Much of the work that was reported in this document last year continues, and so I encourage you to visit the Assembly website at www.assembly.uca.org.au to find out more about what has been happening through the ministry of the Assembly.

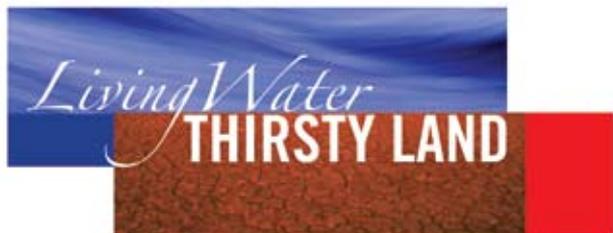
One major undertaking requires special mention and that is the ongoing discussion with the UAICC about the way the UCA acknowledges the prior presence and history of Aboriginal people in our life, and affords Congress more certainty about where it has authority over its own life. As we have undertaken this work there has been much thinking about who we are as a church and the way context affects us. This is a conversation – a missional imperative – for the whole church.

Other significant areas of work include a review of the operation and content of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice; a review of the Constitution/Governance of the Uniting Church in the light of the decisions taken by a number of synods and presbyteries across Australia; work on applying our social justice commitments in areas such as our practice as employers and in the environment; and working with the UAICC (Congress) on a range of matters including a process known as the 'Renewal of the Covenant process'.

In concluding, I encourage you to use these stories in your own settings – please just acknowledge the resource if you copy any material. Additional copies of the report are available through the Assembly Office and on the Assembly website.

Grace and Peace

Rev Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary



IN THIS ISSUE

Living Water, Thirsty Islands	2	Uniting Faith and Justice: Staffing	7
New Directions for Coolamon College	3	Adult Fellowship	8
Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue	4	Secretariat - Drinking at Ancient Springs	9
The Transit Lounge	4	Pouring New Life into Theology	9
Human Rights and Democracy	5	Music Nourishes Drought-ravaged Spirits	10
Living Water, Thirsty Land...	6	Christian Unity: Still on the Way	11
National Youth and Young Adults Ministry	7	Next Gens Project	12

Living Water, Thirsty Islands

Scientists are warning that the consequences of global warming are coming more fast and furious than feared. The people who will bear the true brunt of rising oceans, rising temperatures and extreme weather patterns are those in the third world.

The Pacific island nation of Tuvalu is the first country to have evacuated some of its citizens because of the sea-level rise driven by global warming.

The highest point on the eight coral atolls that make up Tuvalu's 26 square km of territory sits only five metres above sea level. Almost a quarter of the nation's population has already been evacuated and the remaining 8,000 Tuvaluans may also have to leave in future years. The 3,000 Tuvaluans who have left are in the unenviable position of being considered by some environmentalists to be the world's first 'environmental' or 'climate' refugees.

Uniting International Mission has a broad array of partner churches in the Pacific – in fact the largest network in the Pacific. These

partner churches are witnessing first hand the terrible consequences of rising seas levels of temperatures, including a dwindling fresh water supply.

Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea is one such area. During 2006/07, six projects were completed in Milne Bay Province. Gravity schemes, rainwater collection and a well were constructed on a range of different islands.

Some of these projects are located in very isolated areas which can take up to two days of boat travel just to get to the island. The women have to climb down a hazardous track to access water two or three times a day.

4,175 people were supplied with healthy, potable water through the projects as well as many indirect beneficiaries. These are

the thousands of people in the catchment of the villages who use the health and education facilities which have been supplied with water.

In 2008 the project continues and expands.

The major objective is to improve the level of health in eight rural villages on a sustainable basis, especially amongst children, by:

- increasing the availability and accessibility of a safe water supply to approximately 5,500 people;
- increasing community awareness and understanding of the importance of hygiene and other related issues to general health; and
- establishing community based management of water systems to ensure sustainability.

The transformative effect of a ready supply of clean water on a community is all encompassing. Women no longer have to walk to water sources, carrying back heavy loads of water several times a day. Freeing up their time and water allows sanitary processes such as hand washing that dramatically reduces the occurrence of disease. Climate change is a problem we all contribute to and must take responsibility for. Little things like turning a light off when you leave the room make a difference – as do writing letters to your local member to register that this is an issue that matters to you.

**Rev Dr Kerry Enright
National Director
Uniting International Mission**



WOMAN AND CHILD FROM MILNE BAY



New Directions for Coolamon College

During 2008 Coolamon College continued to serve the needs of the Uniting Church for a text based, and educationally sound, form of distance education. With a small staff based in Adelaide it served a wide ranging constituency with many and varied needs.

For a number of years the Assembly has, unfortunately, not been able to fund Coolamon College to the level required to achieve the demands placed upon it. In July the Assembly Standing Committee received a report on discussions that had taken place between the Assembly and Parkin-Wesley College in South Australia, and decided to discontinue Coolamon College as an Agency of the Assembly.

The Assembly and the Synod of South Australia have agreed to merge the distance theological education resources of Coolamon College with those of Parkin-Wesley College. The Synod of South Australia has committed itself to strengthening its capacity in this area and the resources of Coolamon College will enhance the skills that Parkin-Wesley brings to this educational ministry. This is a very positive outcome for students and ensures that the best features of Coolamon College are retained and strength is added.

In a positive step, arrangements have been made whereby all current students will be able to continue with their studies as a seamless transition from one UCA provider to another. The technical situation is that students are either students of the Adelaide College of Divinity or of Flinders University and this situation is not changing. All that is happening is that the UCA will contribute to these bodies through one entity rather than two.

The Standing Committee is very conscious of the enormous amount of work that has been done by many people over the years in support of the ministry

of Coolamon College. There is nothing but gratitude to God for those who established Coolamon College, for the staff and various councils, committees and volunteers who have served the College and the contribution to lay leadership education made by the College.

The Assembly has not abandoned a commitment to an educated lay leadership and to the fulfillment of the dream expressed in the College's vision statement. The Assembly will fund a position for three years that will provide the link between not only Parkin-Wesley and prospective students but also a range of providers of

distance theological education; liaise with synod lay education bodies and promote resources from across the church. Although Coolamon will no longer be a separate institution, in many ways Coolamon is returning to its original vision – to be a network of providers of distance theological education.

In July the Principal of Coolamon College, Rev Lee Levett Olson, accepted a call to become Principal of Nungalinga College in Darwin. Lee served the College faithfully and well and we pray God's blessing on his new ministry.

Until 31 December 2008 the Dean and Educator, Rev Jo Fulton, will be the Acting Principal and the Registrar. Mrs Margaret Wyatt will continue to be available to provide advice and service to students. Current and prospective students are encouraged to continue with their studies through Parkin-Wesley College, which has received all the teaching material from Coolamon College as part of this transition to a new arrangement.

Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary
for Coolamon College



CHILDREN SURROUNDING NEWLY BUILT WELL AT MILNE BAY

Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue

One thing our world constantly thirsts for is peace. This year, as Relations with Other Faiths representative, I sought to relieve this thirst by participating in the Fourth Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue in Cambodia, held in April.

Fifteen nations, representing 620 million people, met in Phnom Penh for the dialogue, engaging with the theme 'Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony'. We explored interfaith strategies to promote peace and harmony through respect, tolerance, understanding, communication, and strengthening of relationships.

The most important outcome of the dialogue was the re-affirmation of the role that faith, and the spirituality of each faith tradition, plays in peace-making.

We focused on interfaith education and looked at what each of us would be doing in terms of growing our children into being peacemakers, able to provide leadership for the future.

Another significant issue tackled was how to establish interfaith cooperation that addresses issues of critical community concerns in the region, such as poverty, HIV, human rights, environmental issues and natural disasters.

With its long history of participation in interfaith dialogue, at both grass roots and official levels, and its strong ecumenical relationships, the Uniting Church has a wealth of experience to bring to the table. However, these dialogues are only the initial step to creating peace.

They won't get headline results and they can't be seen as quick-fix solutions. Rather, they represent long-term understandings of how to transform communities into



REPRESENTATIVES AT THE INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

societies that actively promote and build peace.

Interfaith understanding is built on strong inter-personal relationships. When it comes to how

communities are transformed at the grass roots, that's what wins the day.

Rev Glenda Blakefield
Associate General Secretary
for Relations with Other Faiths

The Transit Lounge

...because life is more than a destination



www.thetransitlounge.com.au

The Transit Lounge, a joint venture of the Assembly and the Synod of Western Australia, celebrated its first anniversary in February. The e-zine is steered by an editorial team including Alison Atkinson-Phillips (editor, WA Synod), Penny Monger (associate editor, Assembly), Meera Atkinson (staff writer, Assembly), Mardi Lumsden (contributor, QLD Synod), and Nicole Reardon (contributor, Assembly).

A new-look site was launched in June with improved features such as a comments function. There is also a *Transit Lounge* Facebook page for further discussion and networking.

This year has also seen the launch of a publicity campaign beginning with an O-week on-campus promotion of the magazine, in partnership with University chaplains.

Rev Dr John Hirt, Chaplains Coordinator for the Presbytery of Sydney, and other chaplains around the nation, handed brochures out at stalls and to Bible study groups.

Rev Hirt said the students' first reaction was one of quizzical interest. "That the Uniting Church has been active in launching this kind of a campaign, principally reaching out to unchurched

young adults in a way that's not predictable and is edgy and inviting, is commendable," he said.

The Transit Lounge has a unique place in the life of the church, aiming to help young people, both church members and non-members, to make sense of what it means to be Christian or on a spiritual path in contemporary society.

With its broad, non-sectarian focus *The Transit Lounge* is particularly relevant to educational settings where it can be accessed not just as an e-zine but also as an exciting resource.

Created as a forum for exploring issues of faith and spirituality the e-zine is published fortnightly, with articles relating to a particular theme in each edition.

Check out the latest edition at: www.thetransitlounge.com.au

Meera Atkinson
Journalist
National Assembly





Human rights and democracy

Following the commitment of the 11th Assembly to support and uphold human rights, through its adoption of *Dignity in Humanity: A Uniting Church Statement on Human Rights*, UnitingJustice Australia has continued its work on issues related to human rights.

Australia is the only democracy not to have some form of national human rights legislation. While we may have believed that such human rights as freedom of speech and religion and the right to a fair trial are safe in Australia, it has become clear that they are not adequately protected. In recent years we have been concerned about a number of significant policies which have been implemented with inadequate attention given to civil and political rights; and others that have had a discriminatory and detrimental effect on distinct segments of the population.

These policies have had devastating personal impacts on people who

are homeless, low-income workers, Indigenous Australians and refugees and asylum seekers for example, and have also impaired the right to a fair trial and to freedom of speech and association.

In March 2008 the Assembly Standing Committee resolved to support, after extensive and substantial public consultation, the development of some form of human rights legislation for Australia.

As Christians we understand life as a gift from God, and that through the life of the Trinitarian God, our humanity, made in this image, is inherently relational. We are human as we live in community – in relationship with God, each other and the natural environment. Christian support for human rights rests on the understanding that community flourishes when all people are included and accorded the dignity and respect they deserve as beloved children of God.

There are many things which we can and need to do to ensure that we develop policies, systems and structures in our society that support and encourage our care for the most marginalised in our society and which bring justice and peace to the world. In this endeavour, 'human rights' is one (but not the only) important tool at our disposal.

As a result of the March resolution, the Uniting Church has become a foundation member of the Australian Human Rights Group (AHRG), a new network of organisations committed to enhancing the legal protection of human rights in Australia. UnitingJustice will contribute to the work of the AHRG (alongside other initiatives) to advocate for the development of national human rights protection in Australia from a Christian perspective.

UnitingJustice has also made several submissions to Government inquiries in the area of human

rights, commenting on anti-terrorism legislation, proposed changes to superannuation arrangements for same-sex couples, and Australia's international human rights obligations in relation to the Convention against Torture and in the area of racial discrimination. In these submissions we express the Uniting Church's commitment to just policy and practice which meets the needs of all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society. We believe that Australia, as a wealthy and prosperous nation, has particular responsibilities to act as an exemplar in the international human rights system, and to implement policy that treats all people in a humane, non-discriminatory and culturally-sensitive manner.

**Rev Elenie Poulos
National Director
UnitingJustice**



Growing a Nation of Hope: citizenship, democracy and a big election

Once every three years, Uniting Justice Australia manages the production of what has become one of the most substantial Uniting Church resources on issues of church, society and environment.

Growing a Nation of Hope: your faith, your vote, your voice was the title of a suite of printed and online resources that were designed for church members in the lead-up to the 2007 Federal Election. They were non-partisan, non party political resources that invited church members to think carefully about their vote by exploring the implications of the gospel of hope for aspects of Australia's national life. The resources included theological reflections, an election toolkit and

addressed issues such as climate change, international aid and development, justice for Indigenous Australians, poverty, justice for people in rural and remote Australia, multiculturalism in Australia and many more.

In addressing some of the hot issues being debated during the election campaign, the aim was to explore the values which underpinned the policies of the political parties and candidates that were asking us to give them the responsibility of national leadership, and reflect on them in the light of the values of the Christian gospel.

This is the largest regular project on the UnitingJustice work schedule but, fortunately, we have plenty of help from other Assembly agencies

and the synod justice staff. We were all very encouraged by the response to the resource – we had to reprint!

Growing a Nation of Hope was an expression of our faith as Christians and citizens of this country, and our commitment to share with all Australians in the search for meaning, purpose and community in life.

As another reflection of the Church's commitment to contributing to a healthy democracy, UnitingJustice made its first ever submission to the parliamentary inquiry that is always held after a Federal Election. Our submission focused on issues of concern related to changes made in 2006 which made it harder for many people, especially people already marginalised in our society through

poverty and homelessness, to enrol to vote.

Australia is one of the healthiest functioning democracies in the world but we should never take it for granted. Like a healthy tree it needs to be carefully watched, tended and nurtured. As Christians and people of the Uniting Church, we have a particular responsibility to ensure that we contribute positively to our society, remembering that the love of God in Christ is the living water of hope that feeds our thirst for justice, peace and grace in this place and in all the world.

**Rev Elenie Poulos
National Director
UnitingJustice**

Living Water...

From Iraq and the Middle East to Sydney and Perth, from the Sudan to Adelaide, from West Timor to Darwin, from Africa, Asia and the Pacific across this nation, Australians new and old come. In cities and suburbs, rural communities and the far outback, multicultural and mono-ethnic congregations, fellowship groups and faith communities, continue to thrive in the UCA.

In the face of the great thirst for a future and for signs of God's activity to renew, such diversity reveals God's gift present among us already. Energy, vision, deep

faith in a saving ever-present God, youth, music, song and dance, the Word lived and proclaimed earnestly and with joy are among us already. Where? In the

"multicultural and cross-cultural Church" that we claim to be, and yet still deny in many ways.

Living water ... We had just met having shared in worship together. Over the fellowship meal we talked together of family, and home country, and language. Then we spoke of faith.

"Four years ago my husband became a Christian. He was a Muslim. He studied the Koran and the Bible. Hassan has a very high education," Mayssaa said. "He is a philosopher and has studied all the great philosophers of east and west. Here he drives a truck, but when he is with others who understand, he is wonderful to listen to and filled with great joy and energy. He is very rational and he studied the holy books with great interest and

seriousness. His careful ways of thinking led him to be convinced by Christianity and he became a follower of Jesus. Then he started working on me."

"He kept saying to me, 'It is true, it makes sense! Look ... this and this and this...!' So a year ago I became a Christian too, and here I am."

"Was it a hard journey?" I asked.

Her whole being smiled, "Oh no, it is just wonderful," she said.

Living water... Following a staff restructure MCM recently said farewell to Ruth Crispin who for almost 10 years was the voice of and first contact for this Agency. She served three National Directors and will be greatly missed. God's blessing be upon you, Ruth.



HASSAN AND MAYSSAA WITH THEIR DAUGHTER

Thirsty Land ...

Across the church there is widespread concern and even bewilderment about the future and the realities of ageing. There are rapidly diminishing finances and properties that are unsuitable and in need of significant maintenance. How will we cope? What is the future?

Where are 'our' young people, the future church? Perhaps if we consolidate, redevelop, modernise, extend our facilities and/or bank the sale proceeds, we can survive!

But to actually share our property, living together as God's people in one place, worshipping, witnessing

and serving in unimagined ways, so often remains an unconsidered reality and an unrecognised gift of God. Perhaps Jesus' response to the anxious disciples that they had the answer already feeding the 5,000 is also an answer to our yearnings noted above. (Matt 14.16)

So, has the answer to our thirsty cries been given already? Might we, the dominant church culture die within reach of the gift already given, like some of the early European explorers? For them it was water and ancient peoples of this land who could have shown it to them. For us it is living water in the gift of faithful people with

grace, experiences, insights, wisdom and spiritual gifts from many and diverse cultures!

Thirsty land... Three matters critical to the UCA are coming into focus in 2008:

- Living together as God's people in one place – faith communities and even UCA congregations whose background culture is other than European continue to thirst after the living water of home-place and equality. To actually be 'one in Christ!' There is urgent need for structural change to release property for mission by the whole diverse multicultural church.

- Our need as a church to accept and make use of the exceptional gifts for ministry already being exercised in the UCA by nXtgen/2ndGen and other emerging leaders from non-European backgrounds. The National Gathering for 2009 will utilise this new wave of leadership already given to the UCA.

- Creative and appropriate relationships between congregations in the UCA and the 'home churches' of many of our migrant communities, some of which are establishing in Australia.

**Tony Floyd
National Director
Multicultural and
Cross-Cultural Ministry**



National Youth and Young Adults Ministry

National UCA programs for senior youth and young adults offer a fantastic springboard for participants through which their Christian faith is deepened and stretched, encouraging them to get involved in justice, mission and service, and in offering leadership in the wider church.

Matt Oliver was an About F.A.C.E. 8 participant in July 2007, with a placement in central Australia. He is an engineering student, keenly interested in issues related to water. He was nominated as a UCA

representative to the Ecumenical Water Network Summer School (World Council of Churches) in 2008, with young adults from around the world. He re-tells the story of an outsider taken for

a 10 hour walk by the locals to collect water. His expectation was to find a lake - something familiar to him from his home. But the water source turned out to be a trickle of water flowing from some rocks. The villagers started to celebrate, dancing and singing, over a trickle of water! Matt reflects, "In the developed world, water is expected. We forget that it is essential to our lives, it is sacred. When have I ever considered water as a sacred blessing from God?" Matt has returned with enthusiasm to continue his studies and his future plans for water management.

Emily Evans was also an About F.A.C.E. 8 participant, with an Indigenous placement in Arnhem Land. She is currently undertaking International Development studies, and serving through the Order of St Stephen in the Justice and International Mission Unit in the Vic/Tas Synod.

Marilla Homes took part in About F.A.C.E. 5, and has been a keen supporter of participants in subsequent programs.

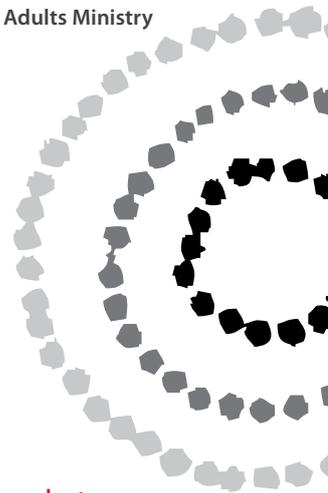
She is currently a volunteer Coordinator for Indigenous delegates at NCYC '09, exercising excellence in leadership, with commitment and sensitivity.

Each of these people represents the tremendous opportunities to nurture Christian faith and discipleship through these UCA national programs with links into ecumenical and other networks. It is a privilege to journey with these people, and to recognize their giftedness and capacity for leadership in and beyond the UCA.

Rev Sandy Boyce
National Faith
Development Consultant
National Youth
and Young Adults Ministry



MATT OLIVER WITH LOCAL CHILDREN



Uniting Faith and Justice – Theology and Discipleship

Staffing

We are pleased to report that the Rev Dr Chris Walker has accepted the position of National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship. Chris will be responsible for providing leadership and vision to the Church in areas of worship, doctrine, ecclesiology and theological critique; and to initiate, recommend and implement policies and programs of the Assembly.

Chris comes with a wide experience in all councils of the church, and has strong gifts in developing accessible theology in a variety of settings including mission and evangelism.

An Education /Administrative Assistant is being employed to provide resources to congregations in the area of Other Faiths, Peacemaking and Discipleship. One of their roles will be to develop interfaith worship services. These can be provided to local congregations and suburban councils who may be holding interfaith worship services. This is one of a myriad of ways that a local suburban council can look to build peace and reduce conflict in its neighbourhoods.

Rev Glenda Blakefield
Associate General Secretary

Adult Fellowship

For 2006-2009, the National Committee is formed of men and women from Queensland. The chosen theme is 'Let the Son shine through'. Membership of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship (UCAF), is approximately 18,000 men and women, but it is very difficult to establish as the States and Territories do not take a formal count of their membership. Many members are adults in fellowship in the Uniting Church but are not financially affiliated members of the UCAF.

The range of groups is extensive. It doesn't really matter what kind of group it is or how frequently they meet - all offer community and mission. Community is ours as a by-product of joining Jesus in his mission of bringing men and women into their full inheritance with God. The 'fellowships' are diverse, active groups of people and culture serving the church as a whole. Ages within these groups would cover the whole spectrum i.e. 18 years through to those folk in their twilight years of 90 plus years of age. Most affiliated members would be 60 years plus. The groups serve two major purposes – to build community and to undertake the mission of the Church. As one of our members Rev Beth Hancock has said, "Community is not an end in itself. Over-emphasis on community can lead to self-absorption. What is needed is a balancing emphasis on mission, both sharing the 'Good News' and also being present with those who need God in their lives."

The National Committee has in progress a project of making rugs. Each member was asked to knit, crochet or sew a square. The squares were joined together as a symbol of unity within the Uniting Church and become a rug of warmth. These rugs would be donated to those in need of warmth and be an expression of extending Christ's love and warmth across Australia and to countries overseas. This project has far exceeded our expectations and to date we have in excess of



UCA PRESIDENT, REV GREGOR HENDERSON HOLDING DONATED RUG

2,100 rugs (52,500 squares). Rugs have already been forwarded to India, Mongolia, Thailand, Uganda, Mission without Borders, Zambia and a number of districts within Australia.

In September 2007, the National Celebration was held at Caloundra in Queensland with 120 in attendance. We were pleased to welcome Rev Gregor Henderson and Rev Terence Corkin. All Australian states and territories were represented and the four days of fellowship were a memorable experience. On one day the focus was 'People with Special Needs' and another was

a 'Multicultural Day.' The Bible Study leader was Dr Val Webb, an extraordinarily gifted teacher and communicator whose two studies provided much food for thought and discussion.

President Alyson Madsen has visited South Australia and New South Wales in an official capacity and has visits to the remaining states planned in coming months.

The greatest problem at present is finding members to take office. Most committees and local fellowships are experiencing this difficulty. Due to age, commitment in other areas and cultural changes the reason for

this is appreciated. Many of our members are grandparents and fulfill babysitting duties, caring for aged parents and are volunteers in the wider community. Adult fellowship members are an extremely loyal group and respond with love and commitment whenever asked to fulfill tasks to extend the love of Christ. The membership supports the churches locally and the wider superbly.

Angela Lester
Vice President
Adult Fellowship



Secretariat – drinking at ancient springs

In the Australian outback people have been known to die of thirst even though they were (unknowingly) physically close to sources of water. The church needs to know where to find the springs that will strengthen it for what, at times, seems a journey through very arid terrain.

For this reason the Secretariat takes responsibility to identify resources that should be published for the sake of the church's health. In 2008 two very important resources have been published.

Theology for Pilgrims is a compendium of all the foundational documents of our church. An unreasonable critique of the Uniting Church is that it does not know what it believes. In this comprehensive book there is a clear rebuttal to such claims. There are documents on the faith of the church, our understanding of the character and identity of the

church as well as its core practices – baptism, Eucharist and ministry.

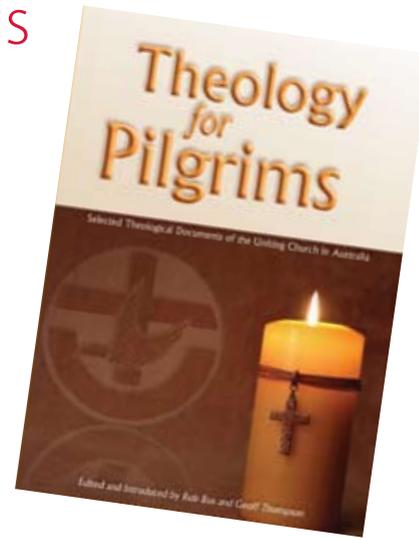
There are several specific documents on the areas of controversy that the church has experienced around these issues in its 30+ years of existence. So there are papers on ordination, including why the UCA ordains women, and our teachings on baptism and our understanding of lay presidency at the sacraments.

There are also key documents on the church's vocation as expressed through its two statements to the Nation, the Covenant with Congress and the statement on being a multicultural church. This large book (641 pages) is a must for every Minister and teacher in the church. It is not only a resource for understanding and teaching about the church, but to revisit some of these documents is an inspiration and encouragement. The Assembly considers this book so important that it has subsidised

the cost and, at \$69.95, it is priced at a level that will not recover all the costs of production.

Introducing the Uniting Church is a new book written by Rev Dr Andrew Dutney who has written several works on the *Basis of Union*. One of the most popular selling books at Mediacom is *Understanding the Uniting Church* by David Merritt, but it has not been revised for many years and is showing its age. However, its popularity indicates that there is great interest in an introductory book about the church. Andrew has prepared an engaging and interesting book that will be useful in a wide variety of settings. He used some of the material in his presentations to the recent National Ministers' Conferences.

These and other very valuable resources may be ordered through church booksellers or through Mediacom: www.mediacom.org.au/index.php



Go to the UCA section where the resources are listed alphabetically; **or call (08) 8371 1399** **or toll free 1800 811 311.**

Drink deeply from the deep theological tradition of the Uniting Church and be refreshed and strengthened for the pilgrimage on which we are called.

Rev Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary

Pouring new life into theology

Theology is not dead; its understanding is necessary so that we may grapple with and achieve a deeper understanding of the Christian faith we proclaim each day. Without an understanding of theology, how do we determine how to respond as Christians, to events in our everyday lives?

This year, Theology and Discipleship has been pouring new life and understanding into what is regarded as a dry topic: theology.

The National Working Group on Doctrine has prepared the first three discussion starters of what are being called *DocBytes*. They aim to encourage theological thinking on specific topics across the Uniting Church. They provide some input and questions, and also point to further reading options. The first three are on apologetics, doctrine and marriage. Future *DocBytes* are

being prepared on evangelism, the Christian life, baptism and peacemaking. They are available on the Assembly and Doctrine websites and can be downloaded free of charge. Glossy copies can also be purchased from the Assembly, costing \$10 for 10 *DocBytes*.

As a result of the 11th Assembly's request to the Working Group on Doctrine, to assist the Church in its ongoing consideration of the theological diversity on the issue of sexuality and leadership, the Group organised a consultation on this issue in February.



SEXUALITY AND LEADERSHIP CONSULTATION GROUP

Despite a history of tension and division across the church, there was a high level of graciousness and a genuine concern for wanting to move forward demonstrated at the consultation.

It was resolved that the Working Group on Doctrine would do further work in the areas of relationships, biblical hermeneutics,

apostasy, marriage, and the strengthening of doctrinal process.

In order to promote further discussion on these matters, a second consultation will take place in October.

Rev Glenda Blakefield
Associate General Secretary
for Theology and Discipleship

Music nourishes drought-ravaged spirits

If water brings life to the body, then music has the same power to sustain the spirit. And if the former was missing, then Frontier Service's Patrol Minister John Case figured he could try to deliver the latter.

It was two years ago in drought-ravaged south-west Queensland that John hit on the idea of holding a number of small concerts on remote properties.

"It hadn't rained for 18 months and many of the people I visited in the Bush were heading down the road to economic ruin and depression," he recalls.

"I asked them what would lift their spirits, apart from rain, and they said 'music.'"

John knew there were lots of concerts in the bigger regional centres, but many of his flock simply couldn't afford to leave their properties. He decided to bring the music to them.

John worked out the costs and succeeded in getting funding for four concerts from the Uniting Church Foundation.

"I engaged an organisation called Viva La Musica which is a loose grouping of jazz, Celtic and classical musicians," he said.

"One of the concerts was pure jazz, another classical and the others were a mix."

Around 70-80 people turned up for each of the concerts which were held on local properties.

In one of the great ironies of outback life, the final concert in June this year had earlier been postponed because of rain – 750mm of it!

"That didn't stop us. The drought might have been over but the need to bring isolated people together to connect with each other is always there," John said.

The feedback from his audiences was poignant:

"One chap came up to me after the Bunginderry concert and could barely hold back his tears. He said he hadn't expected much but would now remember that night for the rest of his life."

The sight of beefy blokes close to tears became a regular feature after each concert. One family sent a cheque for \$1000 to organise more concerts, and Green Point Christian College in NSW raised \$5000 after hearing about the concept.

"I'd like to think that this can become a regular thing, with one or two concerts a year. When you saw the faces of the people at these events, it was plain that something very special was happening," John said.

Rosemary Young
National Director
Frontier Services



PERFORMERS AND AUDIENCE MEMBERS AT OUTBACK CONCERT

The sight of beefy blokes close to tears became a regular feature after each concert.



Christian Unity: Still on the Way

Christian Unity is still on the way to the promised goal. Many of us are disappointed that nothing comparable to the achievement of our union in 1977 is on the horizon in Australia at present, but perhaps we should simply accept this as another reminder that God's timing is different from ours.

There are signs of progress in ecumenical relationships both nationally and internationally. Virtually every church-dividing theological difference from the past (leaving aside issues of church polity and order) has been addressed by theologians from the separated churches and overcome in principle. For example, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999 and the UCA, through the agency of the World Methodist Council, has associated itself with this Declaration. Another important example is the statement on Christology formulated by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Oriental Orthodox Churches which shows how Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian understandings of the person and work of Christ are to be reconciled, a statement with which the UCA has officially associated itself.

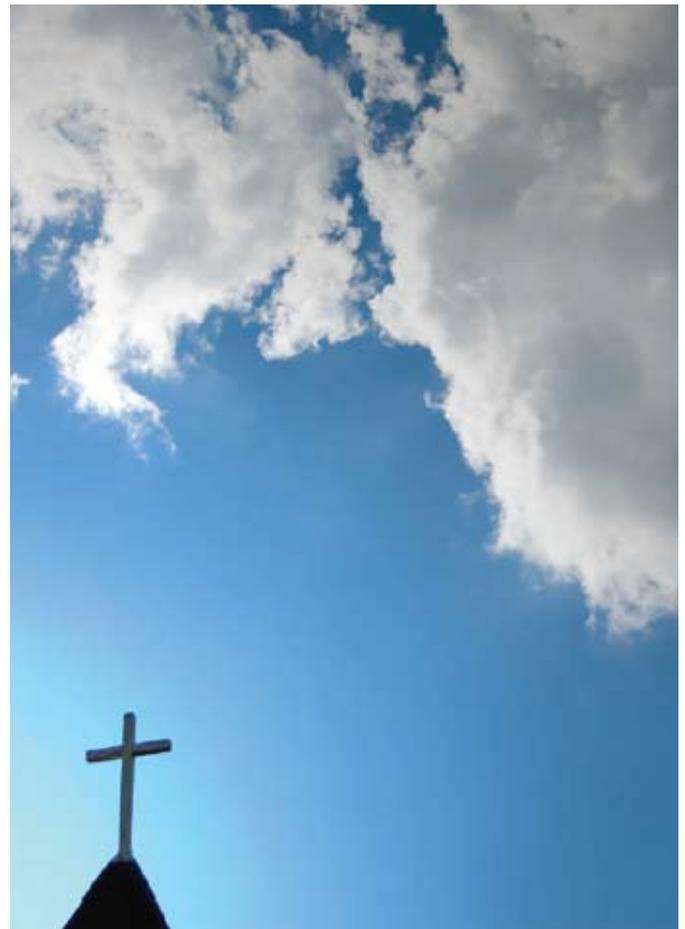
The Global Christian Forum, created to expand the dialogue between the World Council of Churches and Pentecostal and Conservative Evangelical Churches and now supported by all major church traditions, established itself as an ongoing body at its inaugural meeting in Nairobi last year (at which we were represented by the Rev Prof Robert Gribben). It will provide an ongoing venue for Christians of all kinds to meet and converse. While the traditional ecumenical bodies (such as the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia) are reconfiguring themselves

due to major shifts in world Christianity, they continue to provide opportunities for mutual encounter and essential leadership on global issues to the world church.

Nationally, we are only a small way into the ecumenical journey which opened up with the establishment of the National Council of Churches in Australia in 1994. We are in a covenanted relationship (Australian Churches Covenanting Together, signed in 2004) with the other 16 member churches of the NCCA and many in our congregations are unaware of the existence of these relationships, let alone the opportunities for ecumenical sharing that have been opened up for us by this covenant.

In 2007, two new churches were admitted into NCCA membership, the Mar Thoma Church and the Chinese Methodist Church in Australia. We have now established an official conversation with the Chinese Methodist Church to consider ways of working more cooperatively, based on our common membership of the World Methodist Council. We currently have five active bi-lateral dialogues with other churches, with a clear focus of work. These churches are the Roman Catholic Church (Mission), the Lutheran Church of Australia (Interpreting Scripture), the Anglican Church of Australia (Seeking closer cooperation), the Salvation Army (Holiness and Social Justice) and the Baptist Union of Australia (Church Membership).

In the last two years, we have focused our attention on the need



for opportunities for ecumenical formation so that our commitment to ecumenical work will not lack leadership in the future. At a time of deep institutional anxiety about the future, we need to seek to serve the will of God before we seek to secure the survival of our church institutions, including ecumenical institutions.

We are also being challenged by an emerging concern for Christian unity (though perhaps not church unity) among Pentecostal and other Christian groups not known for their ecumenical awareness. The challenge lies in finding sufficient common ground for

conversation and the possibility of joint action. Unity is a gift of God which we need to receive with humility, not an ideological uniformity around which we can organise political pressure. The first step on the path of Christian unity is to turn to God in prayer, requesting with urgency this transcendent gift.

Rev. Dr Sandy Yule
National Secretary
Christian Unity Working Group

Next Gens Project

The Next Gens Project is a project to initiate and support collaboration across the Church in connecting with younger generations and publishing resources.

One of our sister churches in Great Britain is undertaking a very expensive project to encourage youth participation in the Church, in an attempt to turn around some of the negative trends it has experienced since the 1960s. By the time the project concludes, that church will have spent significant resources on what it is calling the 'Youth Participation Strategy'.

Similar trends have long been identified in Australia, amongst the mainstream Christian denominations. However, the Uniting Church response to concern about the participation of younger generations will not focus on structural changes, like changing the staffing and regulations – it is about harnessing the wisdom of all generations and promoting inter-generational conversations, encounters and activities, and about publishing what is happening for the benefit of all who are interested.

Does this relate to the Spirit of Gen Y study?

Yes, and it seeks to move on, using what has been learned and building on that base more broadly and locally.

What have we learned from the 2004-2006 research into the Spirituality of Gen Y?

Through the Australian wide study of the spirituality of Generation Y, (roughly those persons now aged between 18 and 28) young

people from all walks of life and all parts of the population took part in interviews and answered questions about their lives. These questions concerned their beliefs, values, activities, priorities, practices and relationships.

Among the many things learned from the study were insights that the churches have heard from culturally alert and socially aware youth leaders, school chaplains, children's group coordinators, ministers, Christian parents and grandparents for years:

- That those young people who are nurtured in faith as children are more likely to retain spiritual orientation.
- Denominational labels mean even less to Gen Y than to their parents or grandparents' generations.
- That young people who identify with faith communities are more likely to show social concern and act for others' benefit.
- The spiritual values, faith stories and testimony of lived experience are resources for the nurture of young faith.
- If there is any notion of transcendence for this generation, it is found in the quality, tragedy, beauty, enjoyment and danger of relationship formation.

The Gen Y study also revealed:

- High levels of eclectic individual choice in what one believes/

does not believe, yet low levels of what may be called 'spiritual experimentation'.

- Little significant gender difference across the range of beliefs and practices.
- That most young people are unmoved by insistent dogmatism and authoritarian teaching. They are critical of rigid values.

The Next Gens Project invites your participation so that Uniting Church Congregations, Faith Communities, Councils, Schools, Agencies, groups, associations and ministries of all kinds may draw upon genuine experience, wisdom, insight and ongoing study for the benefit of everyone.

A number of key leaders in our Church have already indicated how they wish to be part of this project. Proposals are currently being received from Queensland, New South Wales / Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

These are people who choose not to be fatalistic or passive in response to the statistics and trends portrayed by the social sciences. They want to take hold of what can be learned from research like the Spirit of Gen Y, understand what is going on within and beyond the churches, and act intentionally.

The Next Gens Project will publish the contributions of those who join, and share them as widely as possible. It is not about turning

individual and group efforts into one huge study, but creating links and mutual learning opportunities for a host of smaller and larger initiatives – and to help them happen.

You are invited to join their number with a partnership that may be negotiated with the UCA Assembly, using the contact below. Here are some questions that may help you discern whether this project is for you or your group:

- Do you belong to a church body or group that is engaging with younger generations or has plans to do so?
- Are you involved in research or studies that have to do with relationships amongst the generations of life in faith?
- Have you undertaken inter-generational initiatives that have to do with encouraging life-long faith?
- Are you embarking upon a project to build contact with young people in your context?

If your answer to any of these questions is "Yes," and you would like to broaden the scope of your work in partnership with the Uniting Church National Assembly. Send an email to the address below.

Mark Hillis
National Director
Christian Education
markh@nat.uca.org.au

SOME ITEMS OF INTEREST:

Philip Hughes (2007). *Putting Life Together: findings from Australian youth spirituality research*. Melbourne: CRA.

Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton & Ruth Webber (2007). *The Spirit of Gen Y: young people's spirituality in a changing Australia*. John Garratt Publishing.

Ruth Powell & Kathy Jacka (2008). "Moving Beyond 40 Years of Missing Generations" in *Pointers Volume 18-1*, March, pages 13-15. Melbourne: Christian Research Association.

Marisa Crawford & Graham Rossiter (2006). *Reasons for Living: education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER.

David Tacey (2003). *The Spirituality Revolution: the emergence of contemporary spirituality*. Sydney: Harper Collins.



For more information on any of the stories contained in this report, or for additional copies, visit the Assembly website www.nat.uca.org.au/home or contact the assembly office (02) 8267 4202