

GREVILLEA

November, 2011

Welcome to the eighteenth 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 **Stories that Encourage.**

Bronwyn Murphy, currently the Presbytery Resourcing Minister for the Macquarie Darling Presbytery, tells some very positive stories from rural areas despite the significant difficulties they have had to endure. The Vietnamese minister at Cabramatta, Bui Chi Ai outlines what has been achieved during his time in ministry in that area. Christine Bayliss Kelly, the Children and Youth Minister for Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery, with Erin Mathewson, share some stories of young people who participated in NCYC. Amelia Koh Butler, who has just concluded as Director of the ELM Centre, provides some brief accounts of things she has experienced while conducting training events across New South Wales. She has also provided a reflection on the Basis of Union drawing out its relevance for missional leaders. Finally I have included my report of the World Methodist Conference held in Durban, South Africa.

Grevillea can also be found on the Theology and Discipleship section of the Assembly website: www.assembly.uca.org.au/cudw. Email me if you have some thoughts to share. My email address is chrisw@nat.uca.org.au. I hope you find this edition of Grevillea a stimulus to your thinking and action. Let me suggest you print it out and read it at a convenient time.

Grace and peace
Chris Walker

Stories that Encourage

Bronwyn Murphy

Coonabarabran: Celebrating Discipleship

Coonabarabran (Coona for short) is a small town in rural NSW with a population of 2,600. It is the gateway to the Warrumbungle's and the Pilliga Forest, and is most famous for the 3.9 metre telescope situated nearby on Siding Spring Mountain.

The local Uniting Church congregation of about 40-50 people, see their Sunday service of worship to be the celebration of the discipleship lived out in the rest of the week. They have a lot to celebrate!

Perhaps their most striking outreach is the Drop in Centre, which has been in operation for the past 10 years.

The Drop In Centre is located at the Community Sports Centre and is open three afternoons a week as well as Friday nights. About 40 young people, mostly aboriginal, from primary through to high school age, turn up each afternoon to do their homework, chat to volunteers, play games/sport, get something to eat, and generally hang out in a safe environment.

On Friday night the atmosphere and program changes. The Drop In Centre closes at 7pm and Bible Study begins. Kids may leave prior to 7pm, but if they decide to stay, then they commit to the entire 2 hour program (duty of care). Usually about 20-30 kids stay – and they thrive on it. The program and the leaders take spirituality and faith seriously. It may be watching a specific DVD, listening to a story or grappling with contemporary issues – whatever the means, Jesus Christ is proclaimed loud and clear.

One night they played a DVD of inspirational speaker Nick Vujicic. It came time to have supper and so the leaders moved to end the session. None of the kids wanted the session to end – and said they would forgo supper if they could keep watching and talking about what it means to overcome adversity and disability. Considering that most of these kids have had no experience of church or faith, this is no mean feat!

Local churches take turns providing and serving supper for these young people, and then David Baker borrows the Presbyterian bus and drives each child home to their door. David was one of the founding members of the program and has volunteered his time generously for the ensuing 10 years. David has driven the bus as it picks up and delivers kids home every Friday night, as well as taking the young people on various outings.

The impact this has on local youth is summarised by two year 11 boys who had grown up attending the youth centre. They were the last drop off's on a Friday night and asked David if he got paid for driving the bus each week. David replied 'No'. 'Wow' came the reply. There followed a lengthy silence during which the boys must have been thinking. Eventually one said 'we used to be really bad on this bus.' 'I know' said David. The boy was silent for quite a while and then he simply said 'thank you'. You can imagine the memories these young people will have of faithful caring people who never gave up on them, no matter how badly they behaved.

SMRF funding enabled the Coonabarabran congregation to work with Cornerstone for 5 years. This gave a dedicated and youthful presence by Cornerstone workers as well as the consistency of Uniting Church volunteers. The funding ended some years ago, and while the Drop In Centre/Bible Study continues to thrive, it misses the flexibility and extended opening hours paid staff can provide.

That's not the extent of Coonabarabran's missional outreach by any means!

Thanks to the congregation the local High School has a chaplain who is housed in the UC manse. The outreach of the school chaplain is not solely to the students but also to the teachers and staff who meet together for prayer and Bible Study.

Their overseas mission is conducted through 'Restore International'. Through this separate but church based entity, Coonabarabran congregation sponsors a school in Bangladesh, pledging to meet the running costs of \$4,000.00 per quarter. This is done through personal contributions and fundraising of volunteers. Each Bangladeshi child sponsored is fed, clothed and educated at the school, opening undreamed of opportunities for these children. For more information email Restore International: restore.international@activ8.net.au.

Narromine

Narromine is located near the Macquarie River some 40 km west of Dubbo and 460

km north-west of Sydney. The town population is approximately 5,000 people. The Uniting Church sees about 30-40 people who attend worship regularly but a lot more who are active in their missional outreach.

Narromine congregation place a big emphasis on children/youth ministry, and seek to engage with children/youth in a variety of ways. Sunday school runs most Sundays, but each term a 4-5 week block sees a change in style. On these Sundays KUCA runs, with the final week being a KAOS (Kids and Oldies Sharing) service. This is a combined service led by the children who not only share their leadership gifts with the adults, but also share what their learning has been. This attracts somewhere between 15-20 children, many of them who do not have regular church contact. The KAOS service sees them bring their families – it is held in the hall and is very popular. A special morning tea is seen as a time to build relationships with guests and offer encouragement to the children.

God's Funhouse for Kids is a group for primary aged children (they chose the name themselves). They meet on a Friday afternoon and will often go on an excursion or outing. This group seeks to offer fun and joy to children who usually associate church with rules and boredom. The average attendance can run from 20-40 children. Pastor Lorraine Fenemore caters for High School aged youth who are looking for a deeper experience of God. This Youth Group has 4-5 regulars who enjoy a sit down meal together, sharing the highs and lows of their week before moving into a discussion of contemporary issues or a biblical topic. Sometimes their parents stay and participate which gives the discussion added variety and depth.

Lorraine is currently talking with other churches in town about the possibility of starting Messy Church as an ecumenical venture, and dreams of employing a young families mission worker to liaise with other church leaders as well as with people in the wider community.

The Congregation saw a need at the local Court House and began a new ministry serving refreshments to people who are forced to sit on the courthouse steps, exposed to all weather conditions, as they await their court hearing. A small caravan was bought and fitted out and is towed to the site for each court date. Volunteers offer free tea/coffee/ drinks etc. One church member has lobbied the Shire Council to build a shelter from the heat and rain. After 5 years, the shelter has been built, but is still awaiting seating to be installed.

One couple in the congregation realised many people in the wider community were on Centrelink benefits or very low incomes. As the cost of living rose, buying food became increasingly difficult. This couple rallied other members and the Narromine Food Barn was born. Food that is approaching its 'best before' date is shipped up from Sydney at the cost of approximately \$1.00 per kilo. This food is then stored in a re-fitted and air-conditioned shipping container on the church property.

Every Friday morning approximately 40-50 people come to the Church hall to do their grocery shopping. \$20.00 will see you get close to \$100.00 worth of food. Fruit and Vegetables are given away free. While the groceries are being packed, the client is invited to sit and have morning tea. At the start, few would stay, with most taking their shopping and leaving. Now, people are staying all morning! Volunteers and community members now chat away like old friends. People from the community are volunteering to help out with Food Bank and are very comfortable running about the church property as they seek to give back by serving others.

These two Good News stories are examples of congregations most would describe as aging, with few young families. In each town the same pool of volunteers is called on to run not only the church groups, but also groups like the CWA, Hospital Auxiliary, Men's Shed, School P&C, Lions, Rotary... the list goes on. Given the hard years of drought followed by last year's loss of crops to flood, these congregations would surely be excused for being too weary and sad to do much beyond Sunday worship. Yet, look at them! They are thriving, vibrant, and faithful people who are not focussing all their energies on themselves and their own Sunday worship – these people are living as the people of God in their community every day of every week. May they encourage and inspire you as you seek to live out your faith in your community.

Ministering in Cabramatta

Bui Chi Ai

So, I have been living in Cabramatta, Sydney for nearly 11 and half years. Looking back on those days, there is nothing for me to say but "thank God with all of my heart". Because God's power is boundless, His love is illimitable, His mercy is forever, His faithfulness is great and His blessings are countless.

This is how God brought me to this place. Sometime ago, when I first joined the Assembly Reference Committee on Multicultural Ministry, the meeting was held in Sydney, and one of their programs was called "Multicultural Excursion to Cabramatta- a time to experience the whole world in one place". The committee visited the Cabramatta area.

I was impressed as I saw the Uniting Church building which is right in the heart of Cabramatta, the place people also called “Vietnamata”. About 5,000 Vietnamese lived in this area and about 80,000 in Sydney at that time. But my heart was also very sad when we visited a couple of temples there. Particularly when at the church there were only Cambodian Christians to welcome us and not one Vietnamese person.

On Sunday, I was invited to preach at Cabramatta's service. And at both times - at the Church and with the Assembly Reference Committee, I strongly expressed my concern about the Vietnamese ministry in Sydney within the UCA. They all understood my feelings and promised to pray for this issue.

Some months later, I received a letter from the Cabramatta Congregation, which told me that they would like to establish Vietnamese ministry in Sydney at the Cabramatta Congregation and were seeking a Vietnamese Uniting Church minister. And after much prayer and consideration, as well as contacting and having an interview with the Presbytery and Congregation there, I believed that this was God's plan for my ministry in the new millennium. So I accepted when they called me to become a minister for the Vietnamese people at the Cabramatta Congregation, to commence in the year 2001.

Cabramatta is a special area because nearly 2/3 of Vietnamese in NSW live in Cabramatta. Cabramatta Uniting Church is also the only Vietnamese Congregation in NSW, and I am the only one with a Vietnamese background as a Uniting Church Minister working within the Vietnamese people.

We have achieved growing a successful multicultural ministry through a series of activities which have been accomplished or are currently operating at the Cabramatta Uniting Church. These activities includes: fellowship lunches, English classes, bus trips and nursing home visits.

Here is what has happened at Cabramatta Uniting Church in the last 11 years.

English classes:

This project was established in late 2002, providing free English tuition to over 100 participants from different ethnic backgrounds in the last 10 years. Among them were some Buddhist monks, and nuns, most of the students are elderly people and they were not just Vietnamese but also Cambodian, Laotian, Chinese, Thai, Japanese.....

Fellowship lunches:

On the 24th of March 2004; we started the Fellowship Lunch on Wednesdays from 12:00 noon, admission free for the needy. We began with over a dozen people, with more to come, and up to today we see over 60 people attending our lunches each week from many languages and religious backgrounds. Through our fellowship lunches we anticipate that the Cabramatta Uniting Church will have a stronger presence within the community by providing a place of belonging

Bus Trip:

I organise the bus trip every month. During the trip I share with them my time in the Communist Re-education Camp and show them some Christian videos. People who attend our bus trips are also invited to our church for special occasions, such as

Christmas, Easter or fundraising activities to share the good spirit, in which many of them turned up to our functions.

Nursing Home and Prison Visiting:

As part of my mission I visit Park Lea Prison and my experience in a Communist jail helps me a lot as I talk to the prisoners. I also visit the nursing home to conduct services and offer prayers to the elderly in fortnightly services. It is giving me a very good time as I meet people who are isolated and lonely.

But the very successful project is the English classes. The idea in the beginning was very simple, because as a refugee myself in a strange land, where people eat different food, speak different languages; I know how hard it is for the people who come to Australia like me who struggle with many things and particularly with the language barrier. How can they know all the good things of Australian culture if they don't understand? For them English classes are critical.

Thank God that in the last 10 years over a thousand people have come to our English classes from different backgrounds and faiths. This included Buddhist Monks and Nuns. And not just at Cabramatta but also other areas such as: Fairfield, Liverpool, Villawood and Bass Hill...

In the year 2005-06 there were 127 people who attended our classes. People at Cabramatta say that they have never seen such things happen before. From our English classes there are a lot of good stories of how the church has impacted in the life of community. These are 2 stories I would like to tell you now:

1. An elderly couple who come to our English class has a son who is a pastor of a Church; but they never go to his church. The mother told me that she told him if you are like Rev. Ai we will become Christian because he includes everybody in his ministry, regardless of back ground and belief, not like you who divide people: Christian and non Christian.
2. A Muslim electrician who always comes to fix our power, one day asked me to pray for him as he will be going to the hospital for treatment. He told me the reason why he asks me to pray for him was because after many times having been in the church, he saw our activities such as English class or Fellowship lunch, he said that you are including every type of people into your care. That is what God's people are like – helping all people.

Eleven years is not long if compared with one's whole life, but the Lord gave me many wonderful opportunities to serve him, to praise him and to receive blessings from Him. He guided me from one surprise to another, doing many great things for me, more than what I asked or thinking of, He protected and rescued me through many temptations and trails. My Lord is so sweet and so wonderful, so that I always want my whole life to continue to serve him, to praise him and to let people know about him.

I wish I could say to Him as Jesus said "Father, I have glorified you on earth, I have done what you wanted me to do." and I will hear his voice to me: "Well done, my good and trustworthy slave." But I always know that I am still weak, make mistakes and I still have room to grow.

In my ministry after 11 years here, from Blue Mountain, to Epping, Richmond, Sydney Support Group, and around NSW, not just within the Uniting Church but also with Woman Country Association, other churches, and schools as well, I learned that even when people praise me, I still know that I am not perfect as they said. Even after one of my sermons brought blessing to many people, deep in my heart, I know that it still need to correct many mistakes.

So I am always asking God to hide my weakness in His strength, hide my imperfection in his perfection, hide my mistake in his goodness. I wish I could disappear in Him, abandon all in Him, because I have nothing and I am nothing. Everything I have is from Him; everything I do is His. He is everything to me. May God take over, control me, use me and totally work in me so that His will and goodness will transform my life.

His Word always reminds me of Isaiah 41:10 "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not afraid, for I am your God," and in Isaiah 54:10 "For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you." Sometimes evil attacked me and threatened me, it showed me my weakness, and imperfection, but I, imitator of Jesus, speak the words of God in Scripture to the evil One so that it run away from me.

Our journey with Jesus is still long and has lots of adversity. It needs our continual fighting. But none of mature life is without struggle. If our faith has any value with God, it is not something that put inside a glass-case to adorn the church. It is proved as we trust God in the face of our daily troubles. I never see that the life in God is easy; He has already told us this. But our life will be more value when we receive life from Him and pour out our breath and ourselves in it.

A Church is not built in a few years; it takes a generation or many generations. In the last 11 years, I try my best to encourage people from our congregation to get involved in running all our activities and we do this because we hope that through our expression of God's love, a lot of people who come to our activities will dedicate themselves to God as well as to their family, and we are very proud and encouraged that with the small size of our congregation we still able to achieve so much and run many outreach missions to the community in the last 11 years.

Our work is not done and we need your support and prayer so that these works will continue here. I believed that He will strengthen all of us and make us move forward. I believe that the people of Cabramatta Uniting Church will continue to bear witness for Jesus to the community regardless of colour, background and culture, because at last it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

(Editor's comment: recently Rev Ai conducted five adult baptisms at Cabramatta.)

NCYC 2011

Erin Mathewson and Christine Bayliss Kelly

Over the years many people have attended NCYC. It has always been a life and faith changing event. Parramatta-Nepean presbytery has had an

increasing number attending over the last few years to the point where during the Christmas school holidays 85 young people from Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery and 5 different cultural backgrounds went to NCYC. NCYC is the National Christian Youth Convention for people aged sixteen and over. It is an activity of Uniting Church in Australia, held every 2 years each time in a different state of Australia.

This year NCYC was held on the Gold Coast and was organised by the Queensland Synod. Most people travelled to NCYC by plane on the 29th of December, but some had driven over a few days. NCYC was held at The Southport School (TSS). At TSS we registered, and after registration most people stayed on site but others were taken to Keebra Park State High School which was home for the week. Some had single room or shared accommodation while others slept on the floor of a classroom at Keebra Park. NCYC finished on the 4th of January.

We all had a great time at NCYC. We learnt heaps about God and made many new friends. The theme of NCYC this year was 'Turn It Up,' it encouraged us to turn up our faith. It made us think about finding our own way of turning up our faith. Through submersions, our opportunity to live out our faith, it encouraged us to submerge ourselves in someone else's lives and think about how other people live. We all did different ones. Some of us did Slum experience (Slum simulation game), Backyard Bless (gardening etc. at a church and with elderly people), Blue Care (Singing at a retirement home), Blair Athol Accommodation service (visiting a home for the homeless) and (Serving food to the homeless). Some even went to the beach for a flash mob experience encouraging people to live simply and use fair trade products. NCYC also encouraged us to make new friends with other people in the Uniting Church. There were one thousand delegates there from all over Australia and other countries around the world. There were people from Tonga; Samoa; Niue; South Indians; Northern Ireland; Maoris and Pakeha from Aotearoa New Zealand; Papua New Guinea and many other places. It is amazing to think about how big the Uniting church is.

NCYC aims to: impact and transform lives of young people to discover a deeper relationship with God; be energised for daily Christian living and belonging to a local faith community; and to explore ways to share faith through active service and witness.

After NCYC was over and we said goodbye to all our new friends, and a couple of groups had a few extra days to enjoy the Gold Coast. We stayed in a motel and it was nice to sleep in a proper bed again after a week on the floor. We went to White Water World and Dreamworld. We all had heaps of fun at the two theme parks. It was very wet on the second day. We hopped on a plane to come home on the 6th of January -just missing the Queensland floods. It was good to go home. It was a fun but tiring time.

Here are some comments from some of the youth:

NCYC was awesome! I really liked the community atmosphere. Wherever I went there would be someone willing to strike a conversation. I also liked my submersion where we participated in a slum simulation allowing us to see what it is like for the people living in the slums. Hopefully my experiences at NCYC will help me and many others Turn Up our faith and relationship with God. I look forward to the next NCYC. Daniel Gibb

I really enjoyed the community feel of NCYC, especially during community time. Everyone was willing to talk to anyone. There were many opportunities to learn about God. I really enjoyed the Bible study I went to, that was run by Rob Hanks. Going to the beach and swimming was so much fun. The worship time was very different and interesting. The New Year's celebration was especially different and interesting. The Tongans were running it and we celebrated the coming of the New Year with prayer with the Tongan Choir singing. It was a very multicultural place. I am really glad that I went and am looking forward to the next NCYC. Erin Mathewson

NCYC was amazing! The best parts were the community groups (go Walkman!) and the magic with Christopher Wayne. Everyone I met was friendly and welcoming. People stayed with the groups they came with, but all the groups mingled every chance they got. It was a whole lot of fun. I can't wait until 2013. Peter van Kruyssen

NCYC was excellent! It was a great way to turn up your faith and commitment to God, and have heaps of fun while doing so! The community was great, and everyone was willing to say 'hi' and give compliments. The best parts were most probably the submersions, where I went with others to sing and talk to senior citizens in a retirement village, and the magic shows! Alex Lawless

I really enjoyed NCYC. It was a great time to end 2010 and start 2011. Being surrounded by other Christians of different backgrounds and places really made you understand how big NCYC was. The community groups and submersions were great and I look forward to them at NCYC 2013. I am looking forward to the experiences and challenges awaiting us at NCYC 2013 and wish as many people as possible come to join us. Tom Kelly

NCYC was a great experience for me, I had lots and fun and made several new friends. I really enjoyed some of the electives and the Bible study that we went to, the Tongan feast on New Year's Eve was excellent. I enjoyed my submersion and the time we spent in our community groups was great. Overall I had a great time and would recommend it for anyone in the right age group. Chris Gibb

I found NCYC to be really fun and exciting! My favourite parts were the magic shows with Chris Wayne and I can't wait for the next NCYC! Lucas van Kruyssen

Submersions were great. I went to Slum experience and I learned that I shouldn't take things for granted and I have more than some people will ever have so I should be grateful. Daniel van Kruyssen

The Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery has benefited greatly from NCYC over the years. Many of our current leaders have been encouraged and challenged by NCYC and it has been foundational part of their faith journey. A meeting on October 19th voted to host the next NCYC to be held on January 6th - 10th 2014. We hope to base the NCYC in a precinct at North Parramatta. We now await the support from the wider church but this is an exciting journey and great news of God at work in the lives of our young people.

Vignettes of Encouragement... Reflections from the ELM experience

Amelia Koh Butler

When the drought broke, I recall sitting in my office receiving phone calls from across the state as rain began to fall. I sat by the phone listening to the hope and relief of people I knew had done it so tough. I understood that this was not the end of hardship for them, but it was a God moment to be shared. I felt privileged to be with them and hear the rain fall with drops of courage and promise.

I often received notes and cards from students. These were always welcome and I have kept many of them. Often they told me of a breakthrough faith moment or gratitude for journeying with people as they discovered particular insights. Their faith testimonies in these short messages contributed significantly to the building of my own faith. One contained an Order of Service from 'last Sunday's baptism'. This was special because it was this person's first time as a Presider at a Baptism and there were seven children from far and wide who had come to be baptised. It was a wonderful occasion and a great story of a woman stepping out in faith to fulfil the Gospel command to 'Go, baptise and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28).

On several occasions I was conscious of a shy student or someone who might lack confidence. The joy of developing Christian learning communities, however, was in observing how students minister to one another. People were able to do more than they could have imagined and try things beyond their previous experiences because of the many little encouragements of companions on the way. This gives me a vision of what the church can be - a community of pilgrims who team up as missionary communities, rejoicing as each blossoms and grows. I well remember how one student Lay Preacher started very timidly and quietly, only to find her voice and go on to preach regularly and teach others... Truly this took courage and lots of encouragement along the way.

On one particularly devastating day, close to Christmas (when emotions can be raw), our team received a parcel from our counterparts in Victoria... It was some fair-trade tea and coffee. It was thoughtful and generous and reminded us that people we did not even think of prayed, loved, supported and held us before God. There are countless saints that we do not know about. They are everywhere. It was a small gift that did not solve our problems, but did remind us to put those problems into perspective. Love

always triumphs. We know this, so why should we be so surprised when we experience it?

The Basis of Union - New Millennium perspectives and implications for Missional Leadership

Amelia Koh Butler

Andrew Dutney's recent *Introducing the Uniting Church in Australia* emphasises the *Basis of Union* as a document to be read through a lens of mission. Others have placed more weight on its historical or theological values. Each of these approaches look at the articulated concepts and intellectual understandings expressed in the document. Such readings arise out of a Western systematic approach to ecclesiology. This attempts to answer the question, 'How do we understand the *Basis of Union*?' I bring some different questions: 'As leaders, what do we do with the *Basis of Union*?' and 'What now?' if we are to be guided by the *Basis of Union* and adhere to it in the areas of *Mission and Governance* of the Church, we must ask, *What are the implications of reading it in 2011 in our places of service?* As a way into this, I would like to explore the function of the *Basis* for the UCA. I will then pose some questions that might be considered by leaders in local settings.

The *Basis* can be understood as a form of **self-identification**. In it, we describe who we are, where we have come from, and what influences us. It has a symbolic significance, referring to more than the words it contains. While it may have represented the prerequisite basis for coming together in 1977, it foreshadowed much that would not be articulated until later, which is in our consciousness when we re-read the *Basis* in 2011. Our readings today are full of twenty-twenty hindsight! For example, the renewal of diaconal leadership was foreshadowed in the *Basis* and has since become a reality.

The question *Who is Jesus Christ for us today?* is asked afresh every day. Phrases that once carried particular meanings now carry broader understandings, such as *scholarly interpreters...* The very nature of the language used in the *Basis of Union* seems at times to have been deliberately ambiguous, seemingly ready for the young movement to explore down sometimes uncharted paths. While we carry the memory of a valued past, the *Basis* **invites us to adventure forward** with some confidence that the Spirit of God will call us beyond where we have been.

As a document about identity, the *Basis* acts as a **benchmark**. It does not contain everything about who we are, but it does paint a portrait against which other images are measured. We ask, is this proposition about who we are consistent with our reading of the *Basis*? In the same way, the *Basis* holds something of a family or **community story** or album of stories. In it, we learn something of where we came from, who our forebears were, and what was of particular importance to the Church in 1977.

The *Basis* describes a **framework of organisation** (particularly in paragraphs 14-15) but it does not function in a regulatory manner. It does, however, provide direction and description of areas of the Church's life that are ordered in the Regulations. The *Basis* says of itself that '*adherence to the Basis*' is understood as willingness to work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (as

described in the Basis) and allows for difference of opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith. (*my paraphrase*)

At the time when the *Basis* was being developed and Union was becoming a reality, long held views about Missiology and Ecclesiology were being challenged by fresh understandings of local contexts in different parts of the world. Leonardo Boff's *Ecclesiogenesis* articulated the need to develop new thinking around the Church's expressions of community, and post-colonial evaluations of 19th and 20th century evangelistic activity have led to revised and sometimes apologetic approaches to mission. The attraction of Boff's proposal lies in the possibility of complementary pluralism. He suggested that multiple *base communities* could sit alongside traditional and established communities, resulting in a unity of diversity.

Today, we are in a position to tackle the challenges with fresh perspectives. Just as the likes of John Drane and Rowan Williams have been writing about the potential of working in a *mixed economy*, we face choices about adopting multi stranded or flexible strategies. The current conversations about centralised resourcing models need to be informed with the *mixed economy* in mind. I have had the opportunity to see both the demise and flourishing of education and mission in different Synods over the past five years as other restructures have responded to the changing contexts. During that period, NSW-ACT retained a sense of multifaceted diversity and held that set of values within the Church's unity. For those in the centre of power in the Church, this may seem unnecessary and even wasteful, but for the diversity of this Synod, I would suggest that this is our strength.

During my time in the bush, I was continually reminded of where life and sustenance is to be found, particularly in times of drought. In the driest places, fences and boundaries are irrelevant... The tending of stock takes place close to the billabongs, because stock will not stray further from water than they can return to. In times and places of plenty, greater controls need to be put in place to ensure that different herds and flocks do not interfere or threaten one another's wellbeing. In the same way, we do not need everyone to do the same thing or act the same way. We do need to share the source of life together in a way that does not pollute or withhold from others in the community.

We arrive at a time in the life of the Church that is characterised by generational change. Post-modern and post-denominational leaders are emerging, and working creatively, in spite of some of the modernist structures still imposed or promoted in the institution of the Church. This is a period of transition where both will coexist, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in dissonance. Risk aversion sometimes parades around under the title of risk management, but often evaluates itself in short-term ways, relying on the very business models and practices that contributed to a global financial crisis. In the age of the network of the world wide web, virtual communities and storage in the clouds, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have not yet been named or explored. This is the time when we can truly value the gifts of each and every member of the Church (Paragraph 13), voluntary, paid and stipended, rather than relying solely on the controllable centre. Even those who choose to stray furthest from the places of wealth and abundance have responsibilities, after all, to use their gifts for the benefit of the whole community.

Happily, God gifts the Church with leadership for every age. Like the early Church, we are often tempted to look for them amongst the known disciples, closest to the centralised bureaucracy, rather than amongst new converts or in places like far-off Galilee. The outline and structures for leadership in the UCA (Paragraphs 13-14-15) were designed to encompass leadership near and far, close to the centre and at the

margins. Union was not meant to result in a narrowing of the understanding of ministry leadership (or training and formation for it). The *Basis* foreshadowed the need for adaptability to changing circumstance. Thus, the *Basis* reminds the Church that in every age there is fresh need for scholarly interpreters (Paragraph 11). This is a strong argument for maintaining and developing an academic program that has relevance and recognition in the academic world.

At the same time, the *Basis* reminds us of our heritage and of the traditions of belief that have shaped us. The naming of Confessions and Declarations, Creeds and Sermons, (Paragraph 10) remind us of the deeply embedded family culture of the Church. We are not free to ignore our past for the latest trend or fad in education, but we are called to bring contemporary developments into dialogue with the received tradition. This assumes a certain level of *elementary* or foundational education in matters of faith. Here the *Basis* is outlining some of the components of the educational curriculum!

The *Basis* points to obedience to God, pilgrimage, service and reconciliation as key characteristics of the Church (Paragraphs 1, 3-5, 13-14, 7-18). The Academy is not an end in itself, but exists to support the capacity of the Church to engage in God's mission. It is an *active* form of witnessing that is foreshadowed, not a passive one. Throughout the document there is a sense of movement of individuals and groups of people.

This is highlighted in the central section of the *Basis* about the Sacraments (Paragraphs 6-8). In these words is summarised the cycle that must frame all Christian discipleship. We are baptised into the missional community of disciples. As members of the community we must be nourished and become nourishment. We receive Christ in order to become the means of encountering Christ for others. This is a reminder to us today not to lose the disciplines of faith, but to rely on them. Too often, we ask people to feed the world when they are starving themselves. Too often, people feast on banquets without being challenged to notice the poor at their door.

Just as the *Basis* once acted as a tool for opening up the future, I believe it can be read in the same way today. It does not call us to live with a fixed and unquestioned structure, but reminds us to seek the guidance of the Spirit on an ever-changing journey. There are reminders to examine and correct that which is erroneous and to continue to explore new possibilities for ministry and organisation. It does contain specific reminders of heritage, but it also points to an unfolding journey towards a promised goal. The *Basis* invites us to be proactive adventurers and tells us that for this extraordinary journey *in* the mission of God, we will need all of our resources of learning and faith.

World Methodist Council and Conference

Report by Chris Walker

The World Methodist Council met from 1–3 August at the Central Methodist Church in Durban, South Africa followed by the larger World Methodist Conference on 4-8 August at the International Convention Centre in Durban.

It was a privilege to be part of this international event as one of the Uniting Church in Australia contingent of eleven delegates from across the country. A major component of the Council meeting was finalising a new constitution for the World Methodist Council. This was somewhat tedious but necessary.

More interesting was hearing the reports of different sections, especially World Evangelism, and receiving three new member churches, namely the Methodist Church of The Gambia, the Methodist Church of Tanzania and the Methodist Church of Nepal. The first two are in Africa where the church continues to grow. I was interested to hear of the rapidly growing church in Nepal. Robert Gribben from the UCA reported well on the Ecumenics and Dialogues Committee. An extra session during the conference finished the work on the constitution and passed resolutions from the Social and International Affairs Committee on Palestine, Swaziland, HIV/AIDS, the promotion of the Millennium Development Goals and commended the World Council of Churches' document "An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace." One memorable time was when the helpers were invited into the church in order to be thanked. Most of them were young people and they came in singing and dancing. It was an enjoyable and very African experience.

The World Methodist Conference was an inspirational event with notable choirs, music, addresses and the opportunity to visit some of the churches of the area. At the opening service the Africa University choir sang with movement and passion for the nearly two thousand people present. A colourful banner procession in which the member countries of the World Methodist Conference members all came in was impressive. We were welcomed by the presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of southern Africa, the Premier of the Province and the general secretary of the African Muslim League. John Barrett the president of the World Methodist Council gave the opening sermon. In it he said, "Our aim in conference is to promote the fellowship of the worldwide Methodist family, to encourage one another on our Christian journey. My hope is that we will leave this place freshly inspired and energised for the mission to which we believe God has called us."

In my view the three most notable addresses were from Mvume Dandala, former general secretary of the All Africa Council of Churches, on "Jesus Christ for the healing of the nations", Martyn Atkins, general secretary of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, on "the healing of persons", and Archbishop Elias Chacour from the Melchite Greek Catholic Church in Galilee on "Becoming a Healing Community".

Mvume Dandala said: "The illness is in a world where violence is often being embraced as the sole solution to political difference...a world where the gap between the rich and the poor is inextricably getting wider...a world where the exploitation of the environment continues unabatedly because it benefits some...when diseases like HIV/AIDS decimate entire populations, while pharmaceuticals see this first as an opportunity for expanding markets...when humans deal with one another as if they were different species because of racial and cultural differences, and thus oppress each other on this basis." He urged the church to reclaim its position as the moral compass of the world, not only to condemn socio-economic injustices but to actively champion the changes they hope to see.

In his address Martin Atkins said there are various levels of Christian healing and that the Wesleyan faith has a holistic creed of healing and holiness. He

used some examples of sickness and healing from his own life. Finally he said people should understand that “all healing is rooted in salvation; in becoming like Christ. Death is not an end, but a supreme beginning.”

Elias Chacour based his entertaining and powerful address around his own personal experiences as a Palestinian Christian whose family were evicted from their home but remained in their homeland as refugees. He shared some of his efforts to promote reconciliation and avoid violence between Arabs and Israelis. He has received various honours including the World Methodist Peace Award.

A highlight of the conference was the presentation of this year's World Methodist Peace Award to Rosalind Colwill. A Roman Catholic, she serves as a mission partner from the British Methodist Church on assignment with the Methodist Church in Nigeria. A trained social worker, she initially worked with leprosy sufferers in south-east Nigeria. She became increasingly aware of the number of impoverished people with mental illnesses and learning disabilities where she worked. She gathered support locally and internationally and developed a pioneer project in a village in south-east Nigeria called “Amaudo,” village of peace, which began in 1990. She developed a holistic and community based approach to care. There are now six projects in the areas of care, support and education. The criteria for determining the World Methodist Peace Award recipients are: courage, creativity and consistency. Previous recipients include people such as Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter and Mikhail Gorbachev.

There were various workshops people could attend. I appreciated participating in one on “Passing our DNA: Education and the Wesleyan Heritage” led by Jorge Lockward and “Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations” led by Bishop Robert Schnase. I had read his book and found his explication of it helpful.

We had regional meetings at one point and it was useful to share as Australians, New Zealanders and Pacific Islanders. The Uniting Church group met twice over meals. I appreciated sharing with colleagues about their reactions to various aspects of the program.

On the Friday night we went to various local churches for evangelistic services. I went to a church at Umlazi in a poor area. The preacher was Winston Worrell from Jamaica, the director of the World Evangelism Institute in Atlanta, who I know. It was good to see him in action. The young choir was excellent using a hand drum and bell as their only instruments. People were invited to respond at the end of the service and were prayed for.

Saturday night was a beach party in a large marquee on the sand. It was enjoyable to see people dancing to the band and have some local food. On Sunday we again went to local churches. This time I went to a middle class church which included a lot of singing. In the afternoon there was a street parade from the International Convention Centre to the Durban town square. This was an effective public witness.

The closing ceremony included the installation of the new officers. After ten years of service George Freeman of the USA was thanked and Ivan Abrahams from South Africa becomes the new general secretary of the World Methodist Council. John Barrett from England steps down and Bishop Paulo Lockmann from Brazil becomes the new chairperson of the council. To me these changes were indicative of the shift in world Christianity from the north to the south. The service concluded with Holy Communion and the processing out of people with the banners. The conference will meet again in five years.

Having participated in this World Methodist Conference, it highlighted for me that we in the Uniting Church need to value our Methodist and Reformed heritage and keep in touch with what World Methodist Churches are doing. It provides us with a larger picture of what God is doing in the world and the state of the church. We also have a contribution to make out of our experience. One aspect of World Methodism that I valued was the ready keeping of evangelism and social justice, of personal and social holiness in balance.

Some suggested reading (with encouraging stories included)

Dave Andrews, *Not Religion but Love*

Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*

Adam Hamilton, *Why? Making Sense of God's Will*

Mike Slaughter, *Change the World*

Rob Stoner, *Fresh Directions – a report on fresh expressions*

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