

# Northern Synod News

Issue No 81 March 2005

## The Northern Synod looks to the future

The Interim General Secretary of the Northern Synod has wasted little time in developing a blueprint for the future development and management of Synod affairs.

Mr Kevin Davis took up the reins for one year on January 17th, 2005 and began to develop a strategy plan for the future of the Synod.

As a layperson, Mr Davis sees his role as that of a facilitator and “manager of the gifted people we have in the Synod to ensure that the mission and vision of our church and its members is enhanced”.

Mr Davis believes that his title as “Interim General Secretary” is very appropriate as it reflects the period of transition through which we are going. It also reflects the fact that as Synod General Secretary, Mr Davis has a task to perform and he

intends to do that “with the full authority of a General Secretary”.

Mr Davis recognises that the year ahead will be a time of change and, he says, “I intend to bring about the changes required as identified by various reports and decisions made by Synod”. Mr Davis’ prior experience in a range of management positions will stand him in good stead as he undertakes this task at the behest of Synod.

***“I intend to bring about the changes required as identified by various reports and decisions made by Synod”.***

Mr Davis says “I have assumed my role for the general operations and the organisation of Synod as that of a Chief Executive Officer.” As the CEO, he says, “I am the accountable officer to

the Synod. I am responsible to the Synod to ensure that its policy, bylaws and regulations are enacted. It is incumbent upon me to ensure the efficient business operations of the Synod are carried out”.

“All of the Synod’s officers and Committees and, where appropriate, the officers and Committees of the Presbyteries will have my total support to carry out their duties,” Mr Davis assured the Synod Standing Committee.

In the few months since he has taken up his position, Mr Davis has ascertained that the Synod Office is operating on a sound and effective business footing. The office is staffed by competent and totally committed people, dedicated to the mission of the church.

Mr Davis has already embarked on a number of changes to address past uncertainties about role descriptions and duty statements within the office. These changes emphasise the role of the Interim General Secretary as being the leader of

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a team within which clear lines of responsibility have been established and which are reflected through revised duty statements.

As of this year the Synod and both Presbyteries will implement staff appraisal schemes. †

It is the General Secretary's role to ensure that the Moderator is adequately briefed to fulfil his or her duties. Under this model the role of the General Secretary is that of providing executive support within the Synod and to maintain links with Assembly and the wider church.

***"All Synod's officers and Committees and, where appropriate, the officers and Committees of the Presbyteries will have my total support to carry out their duties"***

**Moderator and General Secretary**  
As the elected head and Chair of the Synod it is the Moderator who speaks for and acts

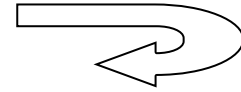


# Clarification of roles ...

on behalf of the Synod. The

Moderator represents the Synod at public or official occasions and ceremonies and inter-church gatherings.

**Are you heading in the wrong direction? ....**



**GOD allows U turns.**

## Synod and Presbyteries

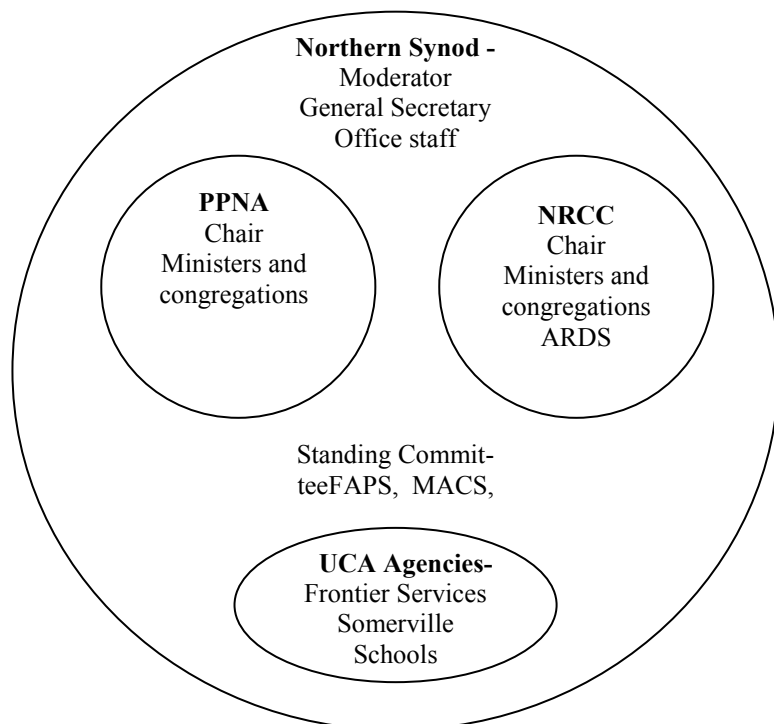
Historically the Northern Synod, largely because of its small population base and vast geographic area, has combined a number of roles that elsewhere would be clearly divided between Presbyteries and Synods and their respective officers.

At the 2004 Synod meeting some changes were foreshadowed and part of the forward planning of the Northern Synod is designed to clarify the separate roles of the Presbyteries and the Synod.

The objective of 2005 is to ensure that both the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA) and the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) will be resourced in order to carry out all the functions expected of a presbytery.

As part of this resourcing, PPNA Chair, Felicity Amery will for this year also provide support and services to congregations and ministers within the PPNA.

## A model of the organisational structure of the Northern Synod.



# Welcome to Kevin Davis ....

**The Northern Synod is delighted to welcome Kevin Davis AM as interim Synod Secretary.**

Kevin has lived and worked in the Northern Territory since 1966 and is well known to many of us in the Uniting Church in Northern Australia. The energy which has seen him fulfil many tasks for both church and community is now being devoted to the ongoing life of the Northern Synod.

A West Australian by birth, Kevin, a trained teacher, was recruited from Denmark (WA) Methodist Church by the Methodist Overseas Mission to teach in primary or secondary schools somewhere on the mission field.

Originally this was to be in Fiji but in 1966 Kevin and his wife Heather, together with their two year old son, were sent to Elcho Island to fill a vacancy there. Kevin and Heather's second son was born in Darwin a year later.

The first task on arrival at Elcho was three weeks of intensive study of the Gupupunyu language. The family remained on Elcho until 1971 where Kevin's role was that of teacher and Principal of Galiwinku Shepherdson College.

In 1971 the family returned to Darwin and joined the congregation at Darwin Memorial Uniting Church. On their return to Darwin, Kevin, now working for the Commonwealth Government in the field of education, was appointed Principal of Kormilda College before moving on to become involved as Superintendent of Schools first in Katherine and then in Darwin and, in 1978, Director of Schools NT.

With the advent of the Northern Territory Government Kevin continued to work in Education, eventually becoming the Director of the Darwin Institute of Technology and, from 1989 to mid 2003, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the Northern Territory University.

On Australia Day, 2003 Kevin received the award of Member of the Order of Australia, for outstanding service to the community, to the arts and to education, particularly the development of educational opportunities for Aboriginal children. This was a fitting recognition of Kevin's great contribution to the community in Northern Australia.

Despite his time-consuming work activities Kevin has continued his commitment to and involvement in the life of the Uniting Church. He is an accredited lay preacher and

has been both an elder and parish secretary, as well as choir master. Currently Kevin is a member of the Darwin Memorial Church Council and is the treasurer of that congregation.

Life for Kevin however is not all work! Coming from a Salvation Army background he learned as a youngster to play the trumpet – from which pastime he tells us he has retired. However Kevin's love of music and performance remains. He is involved in actively supporting the Darwin Symphony Orchestra and is Chairman of Superstar Productions which has brought such productions as *Les Misérables*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and, this year, *Guys and Dolls* to the Darwin Entertainment Centre.

Together with Heather, who was born in Scotland, Kevin also enjoys spending time with his four grandchildren who live in Darwin. †



Heather and Kevin Davis.



# Induction of Graham Brown at Jabiru ...



Frontier Services' David Thiem (standing)



Rev George Woodward, a former Patrol Padre at Jabiru



Some of the local people perform to welcome the new Patrol Padre into their midst.



Above: People from Jabiru and elsewhere in the Synod came to welcome and support Graham.



Above right: Graham receives his charge from Rosemary Young, Director of Frontier Services.

Left: Rev Kate Fraser of Nightcliff and Rev David Thiem of Frontier Services.



Continued next page





Rev Graham Brown and Pilgrim Presbytery Chair, Rev Deacon Felicity Amery.



The Frontier Services team (from left: Director Rosemary Young, Theresia and Graham Brown, David Thiem).



Young people and keyboards seem to be made for each other.



Members of the local Jabiru congregation relax after the service.

Photos: Brian Morgan

The Reverend Graham Brown was inducted into the Jabiru Patrol of Frontier Services in November 2004.

The local congregation as well as those people he will meet as he patrols welcomed Graham, as did a number of members of the Northern Synod who travelled to Jabiru for the induction service.

Frontier Services were well represented by the Director, Rosemary Young and David Thiem as this is a Frontier Services appointment.

Graham's wife, Theresia joins him in his placement at Jabiru.



Northern Synod News

## Farewell to John Rowland.

The Synod held a separation service for former Northern Synod General Secretary, the Rev John Rowland, in December 2004 at Darwin Memorial Uniting Church. The service which was led by the Moderator, Rev Steve Orme, celebrated John's period of service with and to the Northern Synod.

John and Eleanor have returned to Victoria where, after a holiday, they will be looking for new avenues of ministry which allow them to exercise their gifts as a couple in the service of the Church. We wish them well as they return to family, friends and a cooler climate. †



John's last official function as General Secretary of the Northern Synod.



Photos: BMW

John and Eleanor Rowland look forward to the next stage of their journey together. John's stole was painted by Eleanor.

# Update: Riyala Caretaker's Cottage

**Clem and Joyce Gullick of Noonamah express their sincere thanks to all those who responded across the Northern Synod to the Lenten Appeal last year to assist with finance for the caretaker's cottage at Riyala.**

It has been a very frustrating and difficult year as we have continued renovating the demountables. Everything was progressing well when the architect called a halt, informing Clem that he, the architect, did not have the necessary permits to continue as the plans had to be changed to meet building code requirements.

Six months passed with promises of the necessary plans being finalised. The architect had so much else on his plate that **Riyala** seemed to "get put on the back burner" all the time.

Eventually, in late November, the word came that limited work could recommence. The wall framework had to be replaced. This entailed purchasing steel and a new welder.

The arrival of Peter Butler who had offered voluntary work as a caretaker was an answer to prayer as he brought with him his welding skills. New neighbours settling in along the road are Christians and one of them offered his welding expertise as well for a couple of weeks on his days off. Clem was kept busy keeping up with the cutting and grinding of steel for them to weld.



The Caretaker's Cottage Building at Riyala. At this stage part of the wall frame is still missing.



Wall frames, steel cutting and welding equipment



*Text and photos: Joyce Gullick.*

Getting there ... Clem and Peter working on the last wall.



At last ... all the wall frames are in place. It is February 2005.

# from the Moderator

## Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Greetings

As we approach the remembrance of Jesus' death for us upon the cross and the celebration of his victory over death on the first Easter Day, we are preparing for the most significant time in the Christian year. It reminds us of the extraordinary grace and love of God shown in Jesus and the impossibility that anything in life or death can separate us from that love. With that confidence, we can face the future.

And we are reminded that we are "Living together in the love of Christ", as our Synod theme says, not by our own efforts but because of what God has done and continues to do for us in Jesus. We are God's people because of Easter, because God raised Jesus from the dead and began a whole new way of living in this world. Our calling, I believe, as individual Christians and as the church, is to witness to this new way of living in word and deed.

Then, as we move from Easter to Pentecost, we are reminded that God sends us the Holy Spirit to make real to us the love shown in Jesus and empower us for our witness to Jesus.

I pray that in the weeks ahead you will be renewed by the Word of God through these key Christian celebrations.

Further to these few words of greeting, I want to inform you of some of the decisions of the last Synod Standing Committee so we all are aware of how we are working together in the Synod.

Kevin Davis commenced as the Interim General Secretary on 17<sup>th</sup> January. His appointment is initially for one year.

It is now clear that Kevin, as General Secretary is the leader of the team in the Synod Office managing the business of the Synod. Julie Watts now has the title of Synod Finance and Property Officer responsible to Kevin for her work and using her expertise in those areas. In Kevin's absence, Julie acts as team leader. Judy Orme assists Julie as accounts clerk. Lyn Bleakley is personal assistant to the General Secretary and administrative assistant in the Synod office. Lyn is not in the office on Fridays. Gai Nowland will do general administrative duties on Fridays as well as specific work as secretary of the Pilgrim Presbytery.

The role of General Secretary is managerial within the Synod. It no longer includes pastoral responsibilities within the Pilgrim Presbytery. The Pilgrim Presbytery has taken responsibility for providing Pastoral support to its ministers and congregations. To enable this responsibility to be carried out by the Chairperson of the Presbytery

in the first instance, funding for 40% of a fulltime position has been approved for this year. The Pilgrim Presbytery will need to decide how it will order its life from next year onwards. It is recognised that, under this separation of responsibilities, the position of General Secretary is not a fulltime position. Kevin is determining what level of part-time support the position warrants.

The Moderator is recognised as the elected head of the Uniting Church in the Northern Synod and as such speaks and acts on behalf of the Synod. The General Secretary is to ensure the Moderator is fully briefed on public or church matters requiring him or her to speak or act. If the Moderator is unable to attend a meeting or function in the name of the Synod, he or she can delegate to another appropriate person.

With the management structure clear, we can focus our attention on our ministry and mission for Christ within the Northern Synod and beyond.

May the passion of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit empower you as witnesses to Jesus in your daily life and work. †



Steve Orme



# NCYC 2005

January 2005 saw about 1500 young people descend on Gawler, South Australia for the National Christian Youth Convention. This was the fiftieth anniversary of the first NCYC, held at the Sydney Showgrounds in 1954.

The theme of this NCYC was “Live this life”- and that is what happened as delegates met in five distinct communities to engage in daily Bible studies, worship, electives. In the evenings, the social “nite-life” package offered a choice of night-clubs, discussion groups and comedy options.

For the Northern Synod delegation the experience began in Darwin as they left for Adelaide by coach, camping along the way.



On the road

Occasionally this meant camping out—at other times it meant camping in halls.



Preparing a group banner.



The travelling group included not only people from the Northern Synod but also a number of young people from Indonesia and a “fly-in” from Cairns, among others.

Once in Adelaide it was again a matter of pitching tents alongside the others in a canvas suburb.



The NCYC programme opened with a Pentecostal style rally, complete with altar call to which a number of people responded.

This highly personalised approach was balanced by the approach of UAICC leader, the Rev Hohaia Matthews from Port Augusta and the Rev Sandy Wilson, an African-American Anglican who preached at the final night’s worship.

Hers was a call to justice and peace, in faith. She reminded her listeners that Jesus’ way was that of the peace-maker and peace-keeper. She challenged her young listeners to “build a bridge” between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures and “to build a better and entirely new culture together”.

Some people had been fearful that Gawler in summer would be too hot! The weather solved that! It poured, after a freaky wind storm that was less than kind to the canvas city. Tents were abandoned as many delegates moved into classrooms and camped there for the remainder of the time. “I liked it better in the classroom”, said one Northerner.





From this ....  
to this.



The Northern Synod banners will remain as a reminder of a great shared experience.



While there was little formal structure to the “worship” or “gatherings” component of this NCYC, and little or no use of symbols there was a great emphasis on performance. This led to a continuing discussion on the nature of worship. “What is worship?” “What are the similarities and differences between worship and performance?”

Rachel Jennings, from the Casuarina congregation, was part of the NCYC planning team during 2004. Rachel observed that the last few weeks before NCYC were exhausting, but the experience was well worth it. As NCYC organiser, Al Broadhurst commented, “the event was great!”.



The most dominant aspect of both worship and performance was the music. There were at least seven sound stages and music ranged from hard rock to jazz and, occasionally, folk. Hillsong music characterised the worship gatherings.



The range of bands at NCYC included local Christian rock groups, an Indonesian band, Pacific Island guitar groups and a band from UAICC, the Uniting and Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. On the final night, the band of the Rev Hohia Matthews performed.



NCYC 2006 is planned for Perth.



Photos: Steve Orme



# News Roundup

## around the synod

As reported elsewhere, Jabiru now has a Patrol Padre resident in the town, much to the delight of all.



During Lent, a number of Top End congregations have undertaken a series of studies based on Rick Warren's "Purpose Filled Life". The studies are called "Forty Days of Purpose".



The Iona Community's John Bell and Graham Maule will be visiting Darwin later in the year. They are well known for their contributions to developing worship resources and music.

### Tsunami update ...

The national Church has responded and continues to respond to the needs of those people and nations which suffered in the Boxing Day tsunami. To date people of the Uniting Church have generously donated \$1,483,356 to relief funding through UC Overseas Aid.

Partners of Overseas Aid continue to provide **relief**—food, shelter, clothing, clean water—where required. They are primarily filling gaps not filled by other agencies. The focus of this relief work is responding to requests through the Relief Committee of the Jaffna Diocese of Sri Lanka and the

Pancake Day in Darwin was celebrated with great success at Lake Leanyer, after being launched at Parliament House by Family and Community Services Minister Marion Scrymgour. Proceeds from the sale of pancakes in the NT will go to support Somerville Services and Uniting Care.



The Synod Office staff did their bit too in munching pancakes for the benefit of Somerville Services. They've even offered to do it again because they forgot to take some photos for NSN!



## around the nation ...

Church of North India in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The focus of aid is turning increasingly to **rehabilitation** and **restoration**. \$288,700 has been sent to support projects over the next 3 to 4 months.

The next phase will be **reconstruction** of community infrastructure. In Sri Lanka Uniting Church Overseas Aid is committed to working with a number of other church agencies in the Batticola region to build four new villages that will accommodate 1,000 families.

- Rev Bill Fischer, Director UCOA

The Top End recently experienced its worst cyclone since Cyclone Tracey.

We thank God that no lives were lost and that there were no serious injuries despite Ingrid's passage directly over a number of coastal and island communities.

Nhulunbuy was spared the worst but the Christian school at Galwa on Elcho Island was destroyed and Croker Island suffered major destruction. The Tiwi Islands later also bore the brunt of the Category 5 cyclone. Ingrid was downgraded as it moved west, out to sea, but was again Category 5 when it crossed the Kimberley coast.



**UnitingJustice** has upgraded its website in order to better reflect their work. Past agency publications will be available online and the website will keep these and Assembly justice resolutions updated.

The website address is:

[www://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice](http://www://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice)



The **Assembly Office** welcomes new Associate General Secretary, Rev Glenda Blakefield who began work on March 1.



Uniting International Mission tells us that a number of Australian Defence Force Chaplains have been deployed to assist with humanitarian assistance after the tsunami.



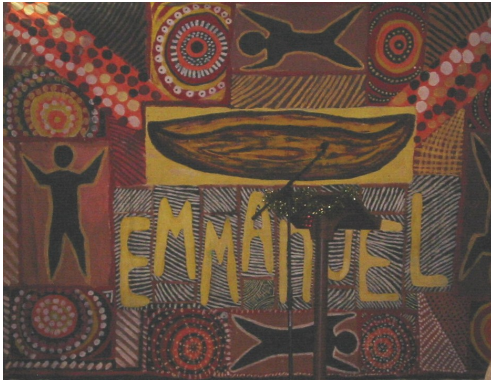
# Nungalinya Graduation

Against a background of banners students graduated from their courses at Nungalinya at the end of the 2004 academic year.

Amongst the graduates was Mowanjum's Kirsty Burgu who received her Certificate in Theology 3.

Congratulations Kirsty! †

Kirsty receives her award from Principal Dawn Cardona



Photos: Julie Watts



Above: The graduating class 2004.  
Right: Kirsty and her family after graduation.



## Louis Ariotti Award to Sharon Davis

**National Regional Manager of Frontier Services, Sharon Davis, has been awarded the prestigious Louis Ariotti Award for her role in developing aged care services in the Northern Territory.**

Sharon was nominated by Frontier Services Director, Rosemary Young, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the care of the frail and aged in the community, and to training those who pro-

vide that care in the remotest regions of the continent.

Sharon has been a strong and passionate advocate for a variety of aged care services to meet the needs she identified, particularly for older indigenous people. She has developed partnerships with indigenous communities and developed programs to allow elderly people to remain in their homes, even in remote communities.

Sharon has also been instrumental in developing dementia services and has taken a lead in ensuring that accreditation standards are flexible enough to accommodate culturally appropriate care and remote service provision.

Sharon will be taking long service leave this year and plans to spend the time in Chennai, India, providing advice on developing aged care services there.

Congratulations, Sharon. †



asked to .

# Meet the new Chair of NRCC

**The new Chair of NRCC is Rev Mawunydjil Garawirrtja.**

Mawunydjil is a Birrikili, Gupapuyngu man from North East Arnhem Land. He first discerned God's call on his life in 1964 when he was leaving school and his teacher asked him what he wanted to be. His response, "A minister...".

It was 1969 before an opportunity came to study further in Papua New Guinea for 2 years. These were both difficult years being away from family and his beloved country and also exciting years, studying learning more deeply the Word of God and developing pastoral skills. Wonderful new friendships were made and new skill as a gardener were acquired, because each student had to grow their own vegetables.

1978 found him working in Darwin when a call came from the Milingimbi/ Raminging parish to return to Milingimbi as their Pastor. So he took up this position in 1979. In 1981 Mawunydjil was endorsed as a candidate for Minister of Word & Sacrament. This saw him back in Darwin attending Nungalingya College as a fulltime student.

In 1984 he took up an appointment as Minister for the Galiwin'ku/Gapuwiyak parish, living at Galiwin'ku.

In this placement he served for 10 years.



Mawunydjil was the Deputy Chairman of the national body UAICC, for a time in the early 90's. He also was the Chairman for NRCC in the early 90's.

The need for administration training and support for ministers saw him take up a 6 week exposure in Darwin office in July of 1995 which was so encouraging that in October the same year a new placement for two years as Admin & Ministry Assistant to the Executive Officer was created and Mawunydjil was appointed to this ministry. Given that he and Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra had trained together in PNG this new team was a real plus for NRCC.

Mawunydjil returned to Milingimbi at the completion of this placement in 1979. He has held the position of Community Liaison for the Milingimbi Council since his return. He recently served a two year period as Council Chairman. In 2002 he was

exercise 'pastoral oversight', for the Milingimbi Congregation.

The NRCC meeting prior to the 2004 Synod elected Mawunydjil Chairman. This appointment means he also represents us on the UAICC National Executive, Nungalingya College Board, and the Northern Synod Standing Committee. UAICC nominated Mawunydjil for the Executive of the Aboriginal & Islander Commission within the National Council of Churches, a position he took up in 2004.

The wisdom and giftedness Mawunydjil brings to his role within our Synod and the wider church is a blessing to us. †

- Stuart McMillan.

## **Christian Unity Working Group**

within the Uniting Church focuses on ecumenical relationships within Australia and internationally through the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, the Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council as well as the National Council of Churches in Australia.

**The Northern Synod is looking for a representative on this working group. If you are interested please contact Kevin Davis at the Synod Office.**

# NRCC/ARDS

## Meeting in Darwin prior to Synod 2004

Greg Stehle of the Aboriginal Resource Development Service at Nhulunbuy has sent us some more photos of the NRCC/ARDS meeting in Darwin which preceded the 2004 Synod meeting.

Delegates speak with conviction.



Some of the delegates.



Everyone has a chance to speak ...

Making music and singing to the glory of God.



and listen.





# Dancing before the Lord ...

In 2004 the Mission and Congregational Services Committee of the Northern Synod (MACS) assisted members of *Yadah Adonai* to attend the 2004 Christian Dance Fellowship of Australia (CDFA) Creative Arts Conference in Canberra.

Debra Harding writes on behalf of *Yadah Adonai Creative Arts* to thank MACS.

“One of the highlights of the conference came during a corporate worship time when two men were spontaneously dancing on stage during worship,” writes Debra. “Looking down onto the stage area I was so touched to see these men worshipping and then to see another man leave his seat and come up on stage, and then another and another until every man in the auditorium (all ten or so of them) was on stage spontaneously and yet in unity worshipping God.

“From where I was it was like watching them being drawn by a call for worship. I could see an amazing beauty and authority within it.

“At the same time there was a line of women dancing Israeli style over to the side and this too looked to be moving in total unison with what the men were doing. The unity and power in this spontaneous worship moved me deeply. This was one of the awesome ways in which I saw God’s Spirit

move at the CDFA conference.”

As representatives of the NT, *Yadah Adonai* presented a dance to “The Great Southland of the Holy Spirit”.



*It was like watching them being drawn by a call for worship. I could see an amazing beauty and authority within it.*

The Conference challenged participants to draw closer to God and to recognise God’s presence with them in their personal journeys.

Sharing with likeminded people and learning from their knowledge and wisdom was important for me at this conference.

***The unity and power in this spontaneous worship moved me deeply.***

During the conference time was given for each state and/or Territory to meet and elect state co-ordinators. Debra Harding has been elected to represent the NT in this role for the next 2 years.

Annika Bisseling writes: “It was very encouraging to meet other people who are also involved in creative ministry.

There was a wide range of creative arts that gave us lots

of ideas and inspirations for the future. It was quite an intensive time of learning.”

Sonia Van der aa observed that it was an amazing experience to meet with 200 other believers with a willingness to praise and worship God, using movement to express their joy and thanksgiving.



Sonia attended a workshop called the “Ahha Factor” and another workshop focusing on communing with God through dance in worship.

Our Christian experience can only be enriched by such ideas.





# Code crazy ...

***The Da Vinci Code*, a novel by Don Brown seems to have captured the popular imagination. It has also spawned a mini-industry of responses and refutations.**

The novel seems to have polarised readers. There are those for whom it is a “must read” and others for whom it holds no appeal at all. There are those who are convinced, despite the fact that it is a novel, that this is the real truth of Christianity. Wrong!

The book does not claim to be anything other than a thriller in the style of John Grisham. True it is about a Harvard professor in search of the Holy Grail. In this respect it is yet another reworking of an old plot.

Part of the trap for readers however is its claim that “all descriptions of art, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate”. Some may be—others are best guesses.

There are however a number of quite clear errors of Christian tradition, doctrine and dogma in the novel.

Error 1: That the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are NOT the earliest gospels but that they followed the Gnostic gospels. But, whereas the canonical gospels have been dated from the mid-first century, the earliest Gnostic gospels seem to date from the second to fourth

Centuries of the Common Era (CE).

Error 2: That Jesus was a great man, but his divinity was not proclaimed until the Council of Nicea in the fourth century. This ignores any number of statements of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, and the general assumptions of the New Testament.

As C.S Lewis pithily pointed out, Jesus was either God or a liar. He could not have been merely a great or good man.

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***The trap for readers is the claim that “all descriptions of art, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate”.***

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Error 3: That the emperor Constantine imposed the canonical Gospels and the doctrine of Jesus’ divinity on the Church. This is a mischievous misreading of church history.

Error 4: That Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. This is a fanciful extrapolation based on the non-canonical Gnostic gospels. The Gospels are silent on the issue but a logical reading of Scripture does not sustain this interpretation.

Error 5: Jesus must have been married because that was the custom of the time. This is another unfounded assumption. Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, as a Nazarene was a typical Jewish ascetic, living a solitary and prophetic life.

Error 6: That the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Gospels are the earliest written Christian records. The Dead Sea Scrolls are purely Jewish texts. There is no evidence that the Nag Hammadi texts were written before the second century CE.

Error 7: That the Church over time suppressed the “sacred feminine”. Brown claims that God was a feminine deity. Scripture clearly presents an image of God which is neither male nor female, although the Greek designation of the Holy Spirit uses a feminine form of language. It was the “unknowableness of God” in this respect which was so puzzling to the Greeks of the ancient world.

Few would want to argue that historically the church has not been guilty of male chauvinism to varying degrees but to make the claims that Brown does goes beyond common sense and historical or theological accuracy. †

**This article derives from an article by Steve Francis published in *Western Impact*, March 2005. The full text of the article can be found on the Assembly Update website.**

Some useful references:  
*The History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley. Lion 1990.  
*The Gospel Code*, Ben Witherington.

# Provocations ... ideas to make you think



Speech is an invention of man's to prevent him from thinking.



Unless you assume a God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.

- Bertrand Russell



God doesn't play dice.

- Albert Einstein



A person without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder—a waif, a nothing, a non-person.

- Thomas Carlyle



We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.

- Anais Nin



All God's giants were weak people.

- Hudson Taylor

Christians like snowflakes are frail, but when they stick together they can stop the traffic.

- Vance Havner



Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the time you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.

- John Wesley



Blessed are the balanced: they outlast everyone.

- Rick Warren



The silence of religious experience is never a silence in which the soul shuts itself up in isolation.

It is a silence which opens out on to the infinite in a true communion of minds and hearts, in real unity founded on respect for diversity.

## Facts of faith

### Fast growing flocks:

Religion	1996	2003	%change
Buddhists	199812	357813	79
Hindus	67279	95473	42
Muslims	200885	281578	40

### National weekly church attendance, 2001

Anglican	177,700
Apostolic	9100
AOG	104,600
Baptist	112,200
Christian City Churches	11,400
Christian Revival Crusade	11,400
Churches of Christ	45,100
Lutheran	40,500
Presbyterian	35,000
Reformed Presbyterian	7,100
Salvation Army	27,900
Seventh Day Adventist	36,600
Uniting Church	126,600
Wesleyan Methodist	3,800
Roman Catholic	764,800

(No figure available for Orthodox church attendance).

Source: National Church Life Survey and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (prepared by the Christian Research Association).

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To contribute news items or articles contact the Editor, NSN ...  
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### Diary Dates

- April 15—16  
Presbytery & children at Presbytery
- April 17—20 Ministers' retreat
- May 21 Graham Bell in Darwin
- June 3 -4 MACS (Darwin)
- June 18 Synod Standing Committee

