

Northern Synod News

Issue No 83 November 2005

Been there ... done that ... or have we?

Many of us know what the annual meeting of Synod is like. Some of us are happy that others represent us. It's all been done and said before. Synod ends and little happens.

Not this time!

The twenty ninth annual meeting of the Northern Synod broke new ground in a number of ways. A new venue – Charles Darwin University – provided scope for a creative Opening Worship Service in the beautiful Chinese Gardens. As members of Synod and others walked into the place of worship and meeting they symbolised the coming together of congregations which is the purpose of the Synod in its deliberations.



Synod members at work

The business of Synod was conducted in what is normally the Central Teaching Building at CDU. Worship, business, book stall and – of course – the conviviality of sharing food together all took place within the same space. Out of town delegates to Synod were accommodated at North Flinders International House, also on the campus.

Both they and the locals who drove to CDU were fit by the end of Synod as they walked to and from either their accommodation or their cars each day. General Secretary Kevin Davis alerted members of Synod to the floral riches of the CDU grounds and encouraged people to explore and appreciate them between the afternoon and evening sessions especially.

The morning devotions at Synod allowed delegates to appreciate some of the rich resources which make up *Uniting In Worship 2* - a multimedia collection of resources for use in congregational worship.

The daily Bible Studies were presented by the Chairperson of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the Reverend Sealin Garlett. He was able to demonstrate in a very real way the grace of the Lord. Sealin Garlett's carefully prepared Bible Studies for Synod were amongst things stolen from his car in the week preceding Synod. All those present were deeply grateful for Rev Garlett's daily studies.

Rev Sealin Garlett



On one of those days he looked at a couple of "the dysfunctional families of the Old Testament" – Jacob and Esau in particular.

Reflecting on John Wesley, Rev Garlett reminded us that, in his own eyes, all his life John Wesley seemed to be a failure. He was diligent in prayer and service but he still felt a failure.

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It was not until he experienced the terror of a wild storm at sea on his way back from America that things began to change for Wesley. This incident was a prelude to his experience at Aldersgate Street where Wesley “felt his heart strangely warmed”. From then on his ministry went from strength to strength.

Dysfunctional families of the Old Testament

Turning to the dysfunctional twins, Jacob and Esau, Rev Garlett pointed out that Esau’s life was filled with choices. But he was the sort of character who reacted to the needs of the moment. Both men, he reminded us, were men of wealth and power but capable of deceit. He also reminded us that Jacob was the third link in God’s plan for his people. Abraham and Isaac had preceded Jacob. They too were not without flaws.

We were reminded of the centrality of God’s promise (in Genesis 28:15 as well as elsewhere) “Behold, I am with you...”

Also wearing his UAICC hat, Rev Garlett talked about a trip to the World Council of Churches in Geneva where he was able to point proudly to the way in which the Uniting Church “has been able to look to the core of the indigenous people of our land for a journey for yesterday, today and tomorrow”.

Transformative justice for indigenous people

He pointed to the UCA’s statement of belief as well as the theme of the Synod, “Forward together in the love of Christ”, as epitomising the possibilities of the church to embody transformative justice for indigenous people.

“It’s not like that everywhere,” he said. “The Covenant needs to be practised rather than left amongst the archival papers of the Church. The Covenant is about Heart commitment”. After telling a very moving personal story, he reiterated that “it is important to acknowledge indigenous culture as well as our faith”.

In that we will be with Jacob at Peniel, wrestling with God. †



Managing the business of Synod.
l—r: Gen Sec Kevin Davis, Moderator Rev Steve Orme and NRCC Chair Rev Mawunydjil Garawirrtja

Business Sessions

Moderator Steve Orme invited NRCC Chair, Rev Mawunydjil Garawirrtja to co-chair the business sessions of Synod. This served on occasions to expedite and clarify matters for the Aboriginal members of Synod and it served as a reminder to all present that, in the Northern Synod, we have more opportunity than most other synods to welcome, work with and appreciate our Aboriginal brothers and sisters in the Church.

Since the last Synod had instructed Standing Committee and the Moderator to charge the incoming General Secretary with the task of developing a strategic plan to set some direc-

tion for the Synod, Mission and Vision statements for the various aspects of the Synod’s work were presented for discussion. An overarching Synod Strategic Plan was presented for discussion.

Already much work has been done (and has already been reported) on the clarification of the roles of the two Presbyteries and the Synod. The Presbyteries have responsibility for the specific oversight of ministry and mission through congregational life. The Synod has general oversight of all the work of the Uniting Church within the Synod’s boundaries.

As part of the direction setting the membership of the Finance and Property Services Committee (FAPS) was re-structured to include people with specific expertise in the areas of Finance, Property, Legal matters and Church Development (a mission and pastoral care focus).

The various agencies of the Uniting Church which operate within the Northern Synod also presented reports. Both St Philip’s College and Kormilda College were represented at Synod. Acting Principal Chris Leesong presented St Philip’s report and Principal Stephen Kinsella presented Kormilda’s report. Both Colleges maintain a high level of performance and are well regarded within their communities. (*See the Kormilda article on p. 16.*)



l-r: Julie Watts and Mervyn Brown in conversation, with Bilanya on the right.

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Somerville Community Services

has had a “demanding but rewarding time” during the past financial year, according to Chief Executive Officer Vicki O’Halloran. Members of the Somerville staff are to be found on various sub-committees of the peak National Industry Association for Disability Services, ACROD (Australian Council for Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities).

Somerville celebrates 40 years of service in the Northern Territory

A feature of this year was the celebration of Somerville’s 40th anniversary as a service provider to the Northern Territory in May. The birthday celebration was hosted by the Administrator, Mr Ted Egan at Government House.

Also this year Somerville saw the retirement of Rev Ron Brandt who has been involved with Somerville for many years in many different roles, not the least of them being the Agency Chaplain. †



A group of Synod members working on the Synod Mission Statement

(Check the Frontier Services Outback Links article on p. 9)

Frontier Services

Frontier Services has a growing presence in the area served by the Northern Synod. Not only do we have our four Frontier Patrol ministers – Graham Brown (Jabiru), Andrew Watts (West Kimberley), Bill Pickering (East Kimberley) and Tony Davies (Centralian) but early in 2006 they will be joined by Mitch Fialkowski in Katherine. There are also whispers in the wind about the Tennant Barkly Patrol in 2006.



Left: Rev Kate Fraser of Nightcliff congregation talks with Frontier Services Director, Rosemary Young.

Frontier Services has also, through the vision and leadership of Sharon Davis, “led the way in changing the face of aged and associated care in the North” according to Frontier Services National Director, Rosemary Young.

From John Flynn’s initial vision of the Old Timers’ Cottages in Alice Springs the network of care has expanded to a range of services and facilities available in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, and Darwin as well as in Wyndham, Kununurra and Derby.

†

From the Synod photo gallery:



Moderator Steve Orme talks with Rev Pat Bremond during a morning tea break.



Below: Rev Hala Tupou from Yirrkala talks with friends. Terence Corkin and Stuart McMillan in background.



Meal breaks gave everyone a chance to catch up—including the children.

Facing the world together

An inter-faith forum on the topic:

Living in the Australian Community with Religious Diversity.

Planned as part of the proceedings of the Uniting Church in Australia's Northern Synod Annual Meeting, the Inter-Faith Public Forum entitled "Living in the Australian Community with Religious Diversity" was a well timed event.

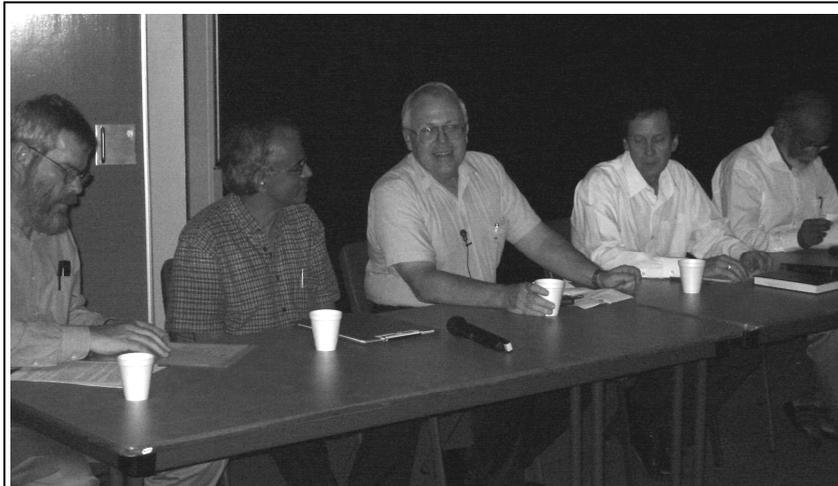
The Forum was held at the Mal Nairn Auditorium of the Charles Darwin University on the evening of October 4th. This was some days after the latest terrorist outrage in Bali.

Panel members were drawn from various faith communities in Darwin. The speakers were Dr Hassan Bajhau, representing the Islamic community, Dr Rajeev Sharma representing the Hindu community, Mr Ron Mitchell, the Baha'i community and Uniting Church Moderator, the Rev. Steve Orme representing the Christian Community. The panel was chaired by Professor David Carment of Charles Darwin University.

Islam is an easy religion to practise ...

Dr Bajhau began proceedings by pointing out that the recent atrocities in Bali are in no way representative of Islam. "Muslims come to Australia to escape tyranny and oppression in their home countries," he said. "They aspire to join a community of freedom." Muslims in Australia are Australians first and then Muslims.

"Islam is an easy religion to practise," Dr Bajhau claimed. "It does not impose conditions which differ from those of the communities in which Muslims live. Minority



The Forum Panel.

—r : **Rev Steve Orme (Christian community), Dr Rajeev Sharma (Hindu community), Panel Chair, Prof. David Carment of Charles Darwin University, Mr Ron Mitchell (Baha'i community) and Dr Hassan Bajhau (Muslim community).**

rights are to be respected and observed. It is a religion of tolerance, kindness and sympathy."

Islam does however require of its adherents some particular observances which may conflict with the community in which Muslims may find themselves.

These are such things as the avoidance of alcohol, although sometimes the need for courtesy and hospitality overrides other considerations. Muslims are not allowed to pay or earn interest on money. However, in many Western countries the scholars have given "fatwa" (a legal opinion or decision by Islamic scholars), to allow home loans for example.

Dr Bajhau declared that there are no areas of conflict between Islam and other religions because human beings are free to worship in any way they wish.

The one demand Islam places on Muslims is that they try to live

out an ideal humanity. They must try to live honestly, thoughtfully, generously, kindly. Although there are numerous Islamic sects in more than 100 countries worldwide, the dominant message of Islam is "Peace and blessing on Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed." Islam requires "loyalty to those who are good to you".

Dr Rajeev Sharma, from the Hindu community described how Hinduism arose in Persia about 3000 - 2000 BCE. Hinduism does not have a single founder or central organisation but it is the third largest global religion after



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Christianity and Islam. In India, Hinduism is the dominant religion. It is the state religion only in Nepal. In Australia there are about 95 000 practising Hindus.

The sacred texts of Hinduism, the four Vedas, are older than those of Christianity. Each of the Vedas covers a different aspect of human interaction.

Although many people view Hinduism as a polytheistic religion (one with many gods), Dr Sharma suggested that most Hindus would see a single deity with multiple manifestations.

Hinduism – one God, many manifestations

There are three goals of Hindu practice: righteousness, material success and the gratification of the senses.

The caste system, which was initially a flexible system allowing people to move through the castes, was legally abolished in India at the time of Independence in 1949. It has lost power in urban areas of India but remains strong in rural areas, despite the law.

Dr Sharma pointed out that India is a secular state although, in India in some matters, religious law runs alongside civil law.

Baha'i spokesperson, **Mr Ron Mitchell**, described Baha'i as the most contemporary and independent of all the world religions. It is a monotheistic religion, founded by Bahá'u'lláh in Iran 160 years ago.

Mr Mitchell described Baha'i as "the most diversely organised religion on the planet" with over 5 million adherents in 200 countries. There are some 15 000 Baha'i followers in Australia.

The central tenets of Baha'i are: the oneness of humanity, the pursuit of universal peace, the elimination of prejudice. Since Baha'i followers regard the world as a global community, they also see world peace as both essential and inevitable.

They also believe that all major religions share the same principles and beliefs and they continue to seek more common ground. They do not proselytise although they invite the investigation of interested people.

Baha'i strives for unity and peace

In Baha'i belief, obedience to the civil law is a form of worship – unless the laws force the Baha'i adherents to deny their faith. Their religion, however, enjoins them not to engage in party politics since this is seen as running counter to global peace and unity. On the other hand they strongly support the United Nations.

Obedience to authority is a key aspect of Baha'i belief. Followers are not allowed to engage in civil disobedience or protest although if the whole Baha'i community agrees they can complain to authorities when relevant.

Baha'is believe that civil law promotes justice, happiness, security, welfare and the common good and liberation of individuals.

The Moderator of the Uniting Church in North Australia, the **Reverend Steve Orme**, began by suggesting that religion can be seen as either a way of violence or a way of healing. Speaking for the Christian community, Rev Orme pointed out that if we fail to recognise the

tensions and differences in our community we are condemned to see religion as violence.

Rev Orme noted that Christianity is the dominant religion in Australia because of our history of European settlement. He pointed out that, therefore, European ideas of church/state relationships had also come to dominate our society.



Some of the forum audience

Aspects of this European background are: the violent suppression of heresy or divergence from state beliefs; peace and security being seen as the highest need of the state and that religious views are a private matter.

He went on to suggest that "Christians are generally happy to stay in their religious boxes and to follow a theology of two kingdoms – a political kingdom to rule the world and a spiritual kingdom of faith".

Rev Orme also raised the vexed question of "What happens when the rules of the state conflict with the will of God?" He referred to the shame of the Christian church's compliance with Nazism as an example.

"Christian allegiance to the state," he said, "must always be modified by the call of God. The Christian church has a prophetic role, but it cannot be violent. Occasionally Christians must challenge the state, especially when a minority is threatened. There is no peace and security for all if some are excluded or threatened."

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Summing up the Christian position, Rev Orme said “The battle for hearts and minds is a spiritual battle and not a physical one.

Religion as a way of violence or a way of peace?

We cannot impose our faith position on others. Truth must be truth for all. We cannot assume that any one person or group has the whole truth.”

In answer to questions from the floor, the Rev Orme also added that the Christian scriptures need to be read in context rather than being read to justify a particular personal perspective.

In this regard, he added, “I often have greater affinity with members of other faiths than with those within my own faith”.

He indicated that inter-faith dialogue focuses on broader interpretations through the life and

work of Jesus Christ – and must be non-violent.

Following up the idea of justice, Rev Orme commented that “that’s why we need appropriate governance. So that the church will speak out of ‘truth’, while acknowledging that we need to live with difference”.

Responding to the same question Dr Bajhau commented that “Islam is not meant to impose itself on anyone. It seeks to persuade. But Islam does not ‘turn the other cheek’. Self-defence, protection of family, property or religion – or to stop unprovoked attack when it is produced by deliberate animosity” - are all justifications for fighting back.

Dr Bajhau commented that “the majority of Muslims do not follow what Islam asks of them. They act unIslamically – and that makes life difficult for many Muslims”. He appealed to Australians to “tell people, whenever an atrocity occurs

anywhere, not to vent their anger on the local community”.

By the end of the evening the audience had gained a clearer understanding of the major religions and the need for mutual understanding and joint action in the name of global peace and justice. As the Uniting Church’s first foray into public debate in Northern Australia it was a promising start. †



l-r: Rev Steve Orme, Dr Rajeev Sharma, Prof David Carment, Mr Ron Mitchell

From the Synod Photo Gallery ...



Food, glorious food!



Stuart McMillan & Rev Terence Corkin.



Rev Jim Downing catches up with an old friend from Alice Springs.



Left: St Philip’s Acting Principal, Chris Leesong with Lyn Bleakley, Synod Admin Secretary.



Right: Rosemary Young catches up with Rev Alf Taylor from Alice Springs.

Northern Regional Council of Congress

The NRCC met at Uniting House for meetings in the week prior to Synod. The following is a summary of the NRCC report to Synod.

Currently the NRCC faces lots of challenges, but that is good because God wants us to grow through those challenges. We have a left hand encouraging us one way and a right hand encouraging us the other way. We have to be strong as an NRCC body and make sure that each hand knows what the other is doing. We need supporting hands to develop partnerships and covenant relationships so that we can grow and develop in the way that God wants.

One of the good things that happened this year was the recent meeting held at Pukatja, South Australia. Representatives from the NRCC and South Australian Congress as well as the Northern and South Australian Synods met together with the Pitjantjatjara people to listen. We had to work very hard to listen to each other and to hear what the Pitjantjatjara people were saying about the kind of support they would like from the Uniting Church.

Support needs to cross Synod and Congress boundaries and ministry to people is the first priority. Church structures come second. Everyone present supported this idea and we feel very encouraged about for the future ministry on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) lands. The Anangu people requested a resource person to support the work of Graham Kulyuru and Kinyin McKenzie and to help grow the ministry in the AP lands.

“We all need to keep talking together about ministry needs so that the members of Pilgrim Presbytery can understand the struggles of Congress and we can understand the struggles of Pilgrim as a Presbytery”.



Carol Gelung and Elizabeth Gurimangu—NRCC delegates



Visitor and Rev Djawanydjawany Gondarra—NRCC delegates

Ministry Area Councils
One of the big challenges for NRCC is to find ways to help the Ministry Area Councils to work better. Each of the three Area Councils – Pitjantjatjara, Kimberley and Arnhem Land – is in charge of ministry in its own region. Since the departure of resource worker, Stuart McMillan in April 2005, each Area Council has found it hard to organise meetings to talk about ministry plans. Meetings in the Arnhem

area alone involves many congregations, speaking different languages, living either on islands or in difficult to reach parts of the mainland. Every meeting is expensive in terms of time and money.

Executive

The newly elected NRCC executive is: Chairperson – Rev Mawunydjil Garawirrtja; Vice Chairperson – Rev Carol Gelung and executive members: Harry Bariya Garrawurra, Marrpalawuy Gumana, Yanyi Baker, Joy Morlumbun, Jenny Imulugulu, Gurimangu Bukulatjpi and Graham Kulyuru.

In the absence of a Resource Person, an Interim Steering Group – comprising the NRCC Chairperson, Synod General Secretary, Pilgrim Presbytery (PPNA) Chairperson and the group accountant of the Aboriginal Resources and Development Services Inc (ARDS) – has been appointed to advise the NRCC. The Steering Group has also been asked to organise for an Aboriginal trainee to work alongside the new resource person when that person is appointed.

Covenant Relationship

The issue of covenanting within the Uniting Church continues to be a big issue for the NRCC. There was a misunderstanding between the NRCC and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) because the three ministry regions had not been able to hold workshops to discuss the issues and there was concern that UAICC was moving too fast.

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NRCC believes that covenanting should happen at all levels of the Uniting Church and Congress – between congregations, between presbyteries and between NRCC/UAICC and Synods as well as between UAICC and Assembly.

Both the National Administrator of UAICC, Rev Shayne Blackman and the UAICC Chairperson, Rev Sealin Garlett were able to share in the NRCC deliberations which happened in the week before Synod. These national leaders asked NRCC to consider three important questions which were discussed in the different language groups. The questions related to matters of Covenanting and the relationship between NRCC and UAICC.

NRCC agreed that all the topics raised were important and agreed that much more talking was necessary.

NRCC resolved that they do not support the new Covenant proposal suggested by UAICC.

The NRCC is currently in Covenant relationship with the Northern Synod and enjoys Presbytery status, on the same basis as the Pilgrim Presbytery of the Northern Synod.

Much time still needs to be spent talking about the implications of the UAICC proposal regarding the Covenant with the Uniting Church but the NRCC stresses that it has no desire to leave its current relationship with the Northern Synod.

While the NRCC agrees that the UAICC should continue to explore all these issues they stress the need to “travel slowly” in order to give people time to become familiar with these ideas and to think them through.

Workers and ministers

Rev Ronang Garrawura is the NRCC teacher whose responsibility is travel to each region and work with congregation members. He describes his work as “teaching and encouraging our Christian leaders to stand strong in the Lord”. Recently he wrote to NRCC asking to return to the Nungalinya College staff and continue to exercise his gift of teaching. NRCC has agreed and resolved to appoint him to a UCA teaching position at Nungalinya. The details of his appointment will be worked out by the Steering Group.



Joy Morlumbun and Janet Oobagooma from Mowanjum

Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Council of Elders and is still actively working in the AP lands.

Rev Djiniyini Gondarra is the newly elected Chairperson of ARDS. He was recently responsible for organising the attendance of the Chief Justice and Chief Magistrate of the Northern Territory at traditional law ceremonies held at Galiwin’ku. This is part of an ongoing dialogue between Balanda (whiteman’s) law and traditional law as a means of helping young people who have become lost between the two systems.



Running the bookstall is a vital part of NRCC. Mary Ngandama

Rev Djawanydjawany Gondarra works as a Ministry Development Worker in the Arnhem Land region to support and encourage congregations and new ministry initiatives

The Congress is also blessed with a number of retired ministers who remain actively involved in the life of the people, Congress and the wider Church.

Rev Walirr Garrawurra is the NRCC Elder for the UAICC Council of Elders and continues to play a very active role in the life of NRCC as he travels. Walirr recently spent time in the Pitjantjatjara region and he was also at Yirrkala for their 70th anniversary celebrations. Rev Peter Nyaningu was recently nominated to the Uniting

Rev Raymond Bandicha has retired and is living in his own flat in Alice Springs.



Daphne Nimandja

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Tourists with a Purpose ... Now is your chance.

G'day all,

These days there are people of all ages travelling around Australia on holidays.

Many of them are wanting an experience different to the standard tourist run or packaged tour. Lots of travellers like to stop awhile and get to know locals, preferably off the beaten track (i.e. off the bitumen) and maybe even give a helping hand in exchange for a different experience. So I would like to spread the word about a new program called **Outback Links**.

This is a program to try and match up the growing number of willing volunteers around Australia (of a variety of ages and a variety of skills) with people in need in remote places. The volunteers are desiring to have a different experience in their travels, to meet locals, experience remote life, see remote country and to help if they can. Many people in remote places have a hard time getting from day to day and often would like a helping hand in anything (e.g. odd jobs, light maintenance, child care, in the schoolroom, fencing, trades, painting, gardening, computing, special educational needs and so on).

Three bus loads please!

When I told one local (Kimberley) woman about this program she said: "I'll have three bus loads please!" This program is trying to get volunteers lined up with those in need. The starting expectation is that volunteers provide their own accommodation and food and are available from 1 day up to 4 weeks depending on the circumstances. Now I know that some hosts would be willing

to help with food and sometimes with accommodation – that would be up to a host and volunteer to agree on themselves. However volunteers are told when they apply that the expectation is for them to provide their own. If a host offers more than that it is just a bonus, not expected.

FRONTIER SERVICES— OUTBACK LINKS

The program, an initiative of Frontier Services which is being funded by the Commonwealth Bank, is being piloted in Queensland this year. Next year it will go national. However now is the time, if you are interested in volunteering to apply to Outback Links. You go to the website and have a read, click on 'To Volunteer' and there is a form you can fill in online or you can print it and fax it in. This needs to be done so Outback Links can have an idea of your particular skills and availability and match it with host needs.

If you want to ask some questions about it all you can ring **Outback Links** themselves on 1300 731 349. The only question I have had from locals was about insurance. Volunteers will be covered for personal injury and public liability.

Two stories from this year in Queensland ...

A young family travelling around Queensland: mother was a speech pathologist and father a computer programmer. They camped at various places in their tent and offered their skills to families in need.

An older couple: the woman was a retired teacher but a bad back meant she could not offer as long as VISE (RE-VISE in WA) volunteers (a retired teachers' volunteer program). However she is very experienced and also has special educational experience. Hubby could do light maintenance jobs. They visited several families to give a helping hand.

Anyway here is the link to the website. Let's all help spread the word. It is early days but the program has great potential.

<http://www.frontierservices.org/outbacklinks/index.html>

Regards,

Andrew Watts (West Kimberley Patrol) †

The website has the current list of needs and is regularly updated. But, to give you some idea ... Current opportunities exist for:

Queensland

Home Tutor assistance in the school room
Handyman

Western Australia

- Home Tutor assistance in the school room (a number of these needs exist)
- Isolated Aboriginal Community needs support with schooling the children
- Assistance for Special Needs Children particularly with reading
- Odd jobs; support in the home

Volunteers also needed for:

- Possible caretakers for a property
- Administrative assistance
- Business Development Manager
- Home Handyman
- Person who loves to sew
- Gardeners
- Heavy Vehicle Driver
- Phonics and adult literacy Tutor
- ... and more

→ HOME

→ OPPORTUNITIES

→ FAQs

→ REGISTER

→ TO VOLUNTEER

→ STORIES

→ LINKS

→ SEARCH

→ CONTACT US

Welcome to the Outback Links website!

Many people living in Outback Australia could use a helping hand. At the same time these people are happy to share the essence of the bush, its beauty, its ruggedness and its history and develop a better understanding of the ethos of outback Australia.

Across our country exists a highly effective volunteer workforce made up of Australia's rapidly growing skilled and gifted seniors population, students, professionals, backpackers and others who would love to see their talents put to use to support Outback Australia.

Outback links aims to reduce isolation and disadvantage in Outback Australia by linking appropriately skilled and gifted volunteers with outback people, who could use a helping hand.

Outback links is an initiative of Frontier Services in partnership with the Commonwealth Bank.

Email: outbacklinks@bigpond.com

Web address: <http://www.frontierservices.org/outbacklinks/index.html>



Outback Links is supported by:



Frontier Services / Commonwealth Bank Outback Links

P O Box 725 Morayfield Q 4506 | Phone: 1300 731 349 | Fax: 07 5495 8570 | Email: outbacklinks@bigpond.com

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals derive from the UN Millennium Declaration that was signed in 2000 by all 191 UN member nations. It reaffirms values

including equality, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for the condition of all peoples. Within this framework the MDGs relate to an even broader context

including peace and human rights. The goals are achievable, but not by "business as usual". Informing and involving civil society is critical to

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Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones in Liturgy

Part 2 of the three part report on John Bell's Darwin workshops, 2005.

Members and Associate Members of the Iona Community are encouraged to remain active in their own churches as agents of change for justice and peace. John Bell's own background is in youth work then in liturgy. Having wanted to become a music teacher, he was called to ministry instead. He is now part of a two man resource team for the Iona Community.

Potential of liturgy:

One of the keys to unlocking the potential of liturgy is what **rumour** we spread about our own community and its liturgy. More often than not we endlessly criticise the church (and our own churches or congregations) and in so doing we turn people away. We need to take this rumour and turn it on its head.

The rumours we spread about ourselves and others and they wear us down. Jesus focuses on our potential, therefore we have to turn our negative rumours on their heads.

The rumours we spread about ourselves wear us down.

We need to celebrate aging rather than to complain about it. To call a new minister means to take the "let's dream" approach.

Belonging

"Why are you still in the church? What needs to happen to your church?"

Three rumours

Rumour 1: Glasgow ... this is a church that doesn't sing. The congregation had had their faith in their singing wrecked. Bell worked with them, beginning with the singing. After 18 months a woman who had been member of the congregation came back after a five year absence and remarked on how well the congregation sang. They had restored their belief in themselves. Now their rumour is that "we are people who sing new songs".

Rumour 2: The Primrose Sisters ... these were the only two remaining members of a now defunct choir of some 30 members. They sat in the front pew. They didn't sing any more but they effectively stopped any singing from happening. Then someone asked for a moratorium on all music and singing for six months so that a new person could establish a new musical approach. This meant encouraging the Primrose Sisters to take a sabbatical! They did ... and it became possible to revitalise the music.

Rumour 3: A congregation **about to call a new minister** decided to make changes". They decided to :

- ◇ abandon the church building
- ◇ rent space in a new housing development
- ◇ meet Wednesday evenings rather than Sunday
- ◇ start with a meal rather than a hymn.

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NRCC report continued. Translation

Printing of the Djambarrpuyungu New Testament (Elcho Island) is expected to take place early in 2006. The Bible Society is working on the text now. This has been 28 years in the making and its publication will be received with joy.

Also in the area of translation many people are mourning the passing in Sydney of Beulah Lowe who was much loved in Milingimbi. Beulah's work benefited all the communities of north-east Arnhem Land. "She was an inspiring person and a great Territorian. We loved her very much." What greater accolade is there than "Well done, good an faithful servant"? †

- Rev Mawunydjil Garawirtja.

Chairperson, NRCC.

The congregation grew from 35 to 90 – mostly new families who were previously non-churchgoers. Their rumour changed form lament to celebration.

We are in the church therefore we belong and we sense that. For others to feel the same way the church needs to become a place of belonging and hospitality.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition began with the Passover. The Passover took place in a domestic setting with a lay presider and it did not include strangers. It was a shared act of a bonded community (an extended family model). What is the history of the church in Australia?

Traditionally people knew each other and the parson/pastor knew them too, so his prayers reflected the reality of the community and his preaching was directed

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at them as well. This was true of the 1930s.

In the 1960s a new idol appears: **PERSONAL CHOICE** – individualism versus the community. We now worship in places where we have no geographical belonging. The minister now wonders where or even whether the people love each other. Members of church communities are now often strangers to each other.

The church is the body of Christ ... within each congregation who has which gift? Asking priests to discern this is an interesting exercise. The body is all joined up – is our congregation joined up or integrated or not? The body is often disintegrated – a liturgical stumbling block when the congregation is a group of strangers who gather to be spiritually entertained.

Is the congregation a group of strangers who want to be spiritually entertained?

We will not have good, challenging, inspiring worship if we rely on the trickle down effect (great preacher, great organist etc). We have to believe in the bubble up effect ... where great worship bubbles up from within a unified congregation.

Space

Liturgical space is the next thing that needs to be addressed. As congregations we are often the custodians of buildings of a past social era. That is possibly less true of Darwin than of many other places. People used to face the front because the only bloke worth listening to was at the front.

We presume illiteracy on the part of anyone other than the minister: that's why he's at the front – and while that was true in the past it is no longer necessarily true.

The architecture of many church buildings forces us not to address the issue of estrangement. It reinforces our separateness A huge church building with a small congregation scattered about is like “the body of Christ with acne”. The building in which we worship has to be taken seriously.

The body of Christ with acne.

When people sit together they talk to each other and become a community. They sing louder. People won't sing if they are more than a metre away from each other. More people are able to participate in leading liturgy and share in the prayers of the people, read the Scriptures and so on when people are closer together.



The building must not dominate the people ... a people friendly building can build congregations. It's a matter of **repitching the tent**. Bell cited one example where a congregation decided to repitch their tent. They decided to:

- ◇ get rid of the pews – the church was most frequently used for Mass or communion and there are usually about 20 people scattered amongst pew seating for 800.
- ◇ reorganise the space
- ◇ put out only enough chairs for the people expected in a large traditional space.

People move their chairs and themselves as the focus of worship moves.

Change

People react to change in different ways. Some react in “head” ways ... they respond to the prospect of change with good arguments and logic. Some people respond in “heart” ways ... they respond with emotion and for them the situation may call for counselling.

No-one meets the living God and remains unchanged. The resurrection is about God's central decision not to stay the same but to change.

The church is not a conservation agent. It needs new models of leadership. A prerequisite for liturgy is togetherness and the reality that those who meet together to meet God will have already met with God on their own. Personal prayer and reading inform corporate worship. Sunday worship is not about “praying badly for the edification of private desires!”

No-one meets the living God and remains unchanged.

Today people come to church, to public worship, to have a private experience of God. The experience we seek is often not the one God gives us. People want spiritual experience without the personal discipline of prayer and reading. Public worship is more formal than private worship but we still know the One at the centre of it all.

(Rev. John Bell at Darwin Memorial Uniting Church. May 20, 2005)



Continued from page 10.

ensuring that governments keep their promises.

The MDGs address hunger, education, gender, child mortality,

Continued on page 16

Lifeline for Mothers in the Top End.

Through the Gift Funding program, UC Invest and its customers are supporting mothers of pre-schoolers in Nhulunbuy, in north east Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory.

A MOPS program, (Mothers of Pre-schoolers) operating in the Nhulunbuy Uniting Church, has been granted \$4,000 in Gift Funding.

This funding has enabled the congregation to buy partitions which were used to physically separate mothers from their children when MOPS was operating in the church building.

With mothers now meeting in a neighbouring room, the partitions are currently used to divide the large floor area for the toddlers' program, MOPPETS, which operates in conjunction with MOPS.

MOPS is a vital lifeline for mothers ..

The remaining funds were used to purchase outdoor play equipment. Catherine Walker, who Coordinates MOPPETS believes MOPS is a vital lifeline for mothers in the far north.

“The majority of local people with young families have relocated to the mining township for work and are isolated from their traditional family support base.

“MOPS enables mothers to get out of the house and interact with other mums in the same situation,” said Catherine.

“Several mums say they wouldn't survive without MOPS.

“In Nhulunbuy MOPS is a bridge ministry to the local community.

We are not overly evangelistic, but we do include some discussion about Jesus and Christian faith,” she said.

“While MOPS is sponsored and supported by the Nhulunbuy Uniting Church, the mothers on the MOPS team include members of the local Baptist, AOG and Catholic churches,” said Catherine.

“We've also developed MOPS in a BOX. We package one of our discussions with tea, coffee, goodies and a craft activity and send the boxes to mothers living in remote communities in Arnhem Land.

“We are also thinking about how we can introduce MOPS to local Aboriginal communities, to encourage Aboriginal women to take time out for themselves,” said Catherine.

While traditionally UC Invest has only granted Gift Funding to South Australian congregations, some funding is now being made available to congregations in the Northern Synod because UC Invest manages accounts on behalf of Northern Synod investors. At the end of last year more than \$1.2 million was invested in the Northern Synod Development Fund and administered by UC Invest.

MOPS is a church-based program designed for mothers with babies and children under school age. It originated in America more than 30 years ago and is now an international program, with more than 100 groups operating throughout Australia.

The program offers mothers time-out to develop friendships,

explore their creativity through craft activities and enjoy Christian fellowship.

Their children are cared for in MOPPETS, a program that offers a loving, learning, fun environment. †

(Thanks to *New Times, S.A.* for the text of this story)

The Micah Challenge

Have you noticed people wandering about wearing a white wrist band saying “MAKE POVERTY HISTORY”?

You may well have. The wrist bands are part of a drive to raise consciousness about eradicating poverty from the world.

The people who wear the bands may well have signed the MICAH CALL ... see the website:

www.micahchallenge.org.au/

The MICAH CHALLENGE is a worldwide movement and it encourages Christians to deepen their understanding of justice issues and engagement with the poor.

Its aim is linked to those of the United Nations Millenium Goals and is especially focused on attempting to “make poverty history” by encouraging all world leaders (including our own) to halve global poverty by 2015.

The next World Poverty Day is December 10, 2005 and people are urged to wear their “MAKE POVERTY HISTORY” wrist bands on that day.

Wearing the wristbands alone will do little but prayer can do much.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King, Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963. †

News Roundup

around the synod ...

The Vice Moderator of the Evangelical Church of Timor, Rev Ebenhaizer Imanuel Nuban Timo preached at Darwin Memorial on the weekend of Presbytery. Eben was also present at the meetings of Synod.



l—r: Rev Steve Orme, Rev Mawunydjil Garawirttja, Rev Eben Timo and Synod Gen Sec Kevin Davis



Rev Eben receives a gift from the Moderator on behalf of Synod

Fare well ...

September 30 also saw a gathering at Nightcliff UC to celebrate the ministry of the Rev Ron and Mrs Jo Brandt. †
(see articles on page 15,16)

around the world ...

Death of Brother Roger of Taizé

During Evening Prayer on Tuesday August 16th, in the midst of the crowd surrounding the Community in the Church of Reconciliation, a woman—probably mentally disturbed—struck Br Roger violently with knife blows. He died a few moments later.

In its sorrow the Taizé Community thanked all those who supported it in prayer and affection.

The next morning this prayer was read in the church:

“Christ of compassion, you enable us to be in communion with those who have gone before us, and who remain close to us. We confide into your hands our Brother Roger. He already contemplates the invisible. In his footsteps you are preparing us to welcome a radiance of your brightness.”

Br Roger’s funeral was held at



Br Roger’s funeral at Taizé.

Taizé on August 23.

Some eight years earlier Br Roger, who founded the ecumenical Community of Reconciliation in the wake of the War, designated Br Alois to succeed him as leader of the Community.

The funeral of Brother Roger, founder of the ecumenical Community of Taizé, was celebrated on Tuesday 23 August 2005 in the Church of Reconciliation in Taizé. The celebration was pre-



A musical tribute to the Brandts at Synod.

National recognition ...

Norma Allen, a member of Darwin Memorial and NT President of the Legacy War Widows was invited to join a group of Australian veterans to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Pearl Harbour in September. †

sided over by Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, with the four priest brothers of Taizé. Bible readings were read by Anglican and Protestant representatives, and the final prayer was sung by representatives of Orthodox Churches.

A very frail Br Roger had earlier been present at the funeral Mass for Pope John Paul II and, although he was not a Catholic, had been the first to be given Communion by then Cardinal Ratzinger. †



Remembering the Brandts.

From Tony Goodluck ...

I remember Ron as the Minister at Nightcliff in the late 70s early 80s.

The young Adults group would sometimes have a square-dance at the Nightcliff Church. Who in their right mind would do such a thing in that heat? After the dance we would move our sweaty bodies over to the manse and cool off in the pool. Inevitably we would play 'keepings off' boys-against-girls. Ron would come and join us and always went on the girls team. I remember trying to get the ball off Ron who would hold me at bay with one large hand firmly on my head, while he decided where to throw the ball. He would dunk me under the water every few seconds with very little effort and there was nothing I could do about it. One memorable night after a dance we looked up from the pool to see our 'gentle giant' coming down the stairs with a blond wig on. What a sight.

Another memory I have was one year when the young adults did a theatre restaurant as a fundraiser over at Nungalinya. One of the skits was a send-up of the parish council meeting. Mind you it wasn't at all difficult to send up the parish council. I was dressed in a safari suit with mutton-chop side burns as Rev Bill Clarke (from Casuarina), Ken Aitken had a camera around his neck, as Rev Nevin Vawser (from Darwin), taking photos of everything that moved, and Steve Brandt was dressed as his dad, Ron (from Nightcliff). Steve had on an orange skull-cap and a pillow across his chest tucked tightly into a tee-shirt. He looked ridiculous, but there was no mistaking who he was trying to look like. At the critical point in the skit where Steve was to stand up and say a

few words he pushed his chair back and fell backwards off the stage. Ken and I grabbed him, one hand from each side, before he completely disappeared and literally launched him back onto the stage.

Without missing a beat and completely ad lib Steve shouted, "Well shave my head and call me Kojac, I'm in charge now!"

At which point Ron called out, "So there's my boots and my shorts. No wonder I couldn't find them."

Ron shared our fun and he shared our struggles too. When times were tough, and sometimes they were very tough, we knew Ron had time for us, because he made time to build friendships with us when times were good. Thanks Ron.

Grace and Peace to you always.



And from Peg and Jack Goodluck

Ron, we've been told that you are retiring. People said that about us twelve years ago, but it didn't mean nothing more to do. They have been twelve busy years, but enjoyable and relaxed, too. You get to do the things you choose to do, and it's OK to say "No" to other people's demands.

We wish you and Jo a happy and fulfilling post-employment season, and the satisfaction of doing things that you haven't had time to do before.

Peg's memory of our meeting with you. "What a refreshingly different looking person! Yellow boots, short shorts and a widely open-necked shirt and a big cross, closely shaved head, lovely smile, Australian drawl, and talking about 'the clues of Christ'. Ron always

showed without doubt that he was an authentic servant of Christ." And Peg remembers learning that Jo was a Physical Education teacher, and wondering where she would find her new vocation in Darwin - which she certainly has done in her great work with pre-school education. Well done.

We have a photo of you, Keith Fagg, us, and about twenty others at a new staff orientation course at Nungalinya. They were good days, weren't they?

Also I have a cherished memory of calling on you one evening soon after you arrived in Nightcliff. You were getting used to the idea that local church leaders were not as ready as they had said they would be to take a fresh approach to Church life and mission, and wondering, I suspect, whether you should not have come to Darwin. Was that 1979? Twenty-six years ago?

That evening, I told you, straight up, what a wonderful gift you and Jo were to those church leaders and to the rest of us: and when Jo came home you told her that we had been having an "incredible conversation". Often after that I often heard you speak of many things as "incredible". I learnt that you were not saying that things were not credible, or were not to be believed, but that things were better by far than we usually dared to believe they were. And I'd like to say that I hope that you two incredible people are going to have an incredible experience of being retired folk.

Through your long years of service in Darwin you have stepped up in many over-burdened people's lives to take the weight of their crosses.

Well-done big man! And you and

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Ron and Jo Brandt

On September 30th, about 90 people gathered at the Nightcliff Uniting Church to share with members of the Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) and the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia (PPNA) a special covenant event of worship and entertainment to celebrate the ministry of the Rev Ron Brandt and Mrs Jo Brandt.

Eric Neil, representing PPNA and Mawunydjil Garawirtja representing NRCC did a wonderful job as Masters of Ceremonies and the evening was opened with an Indonesian song of welcome from Rev Thresi Mauboy and members of the Indonesian Missionary congregation.

A delicious supper was provided by members of the Nightcliff congregation and Rev Kate Fraser's worries that there may not be enough to eat were soon put to rest as plate after plate of scrumptious food appeared.

When everyone had had their fill, we moved into the church for an evening's entertainment although not too many of us had expected that God and Gabriel (alias Rev Jim Downing and Rev George Woodward) would be taking part in the program. They were ably supported by a heavenly choir made up of Maude Ellis, Margaret McDermid and Mary Penton. Rev Ron looked suitably impressed when he was presented with a pair of "holey" thongs.



Kevin Davis, General Secretary of Synod looked in his element when, baton in hand, he led the NRCC choir, aided by several other keen choristers, in stirring renditions of "Guide me oh thou Great Jehovah" and "When I survey the wondrous cross".



Among those telling stories of Rev Ron's northern ministries, was Greg Goodluck who shared his brother's great memories of happy times in the Nightcliff congregation. The Goodluck family members were much enlivened and blessed by having a minister who had such a rapport with young people. Greg also brought good wishes from his parents, Jack and Peg Goodluck.

During the course of the evening Shirley Downing generously gave of her wonderful artistic abilities to produce a portrait of Ron and Jo which was presented to them at the end of the evening. The portrait has since been entered into the Senior Territorian Art Award. Shirley also made a graffiti board on which guests wrote messages for Ron and Jo.

There was more music to enjoy from the Indonesian Missionary congregation and the Kerygma Music Group before the evening concluded with everyone sharing a time of blessing and prayer led by Rev Steve Orme.

May God richly bless Jo and Ron as they enjoy their retirement. †

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Millenium Development Goals

maternal health, diseases, environment and trade.

Goal 1: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Goal 2: to achieve universal primary education.

Goal 3: to promote gender equality and empower women.

Goal 4: to reduce child mortality.

Goal 5: to improve maternal health.

Goal 6: to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Goal 7: to ensure environmental sustainability.

Goal 8: to develop a global partnership for development.

†

For Jesus there is no happy ending in this world. The challenge of Jesus is not to solve all the world's problems before the end of time but to remain faithful at any cost. Henri Nouwen

Kormilda Makes the Grade!

Kormilda College, Darwin—a Uniting and Anglican School—has achieved "Full Accredited Status" from the Council of International Schools (CIS).

In so doing it has joined a group of 150 schools around the world with CIS accreditation.

This means that the education offered at Kormilda has been independently assessed as being literally world class.

Principal, Steven Kinsella expressed his congratulations to and appreciation of the contribution of the entire College community in making this achievement possible.

The Northern Synod also congratulates Kormilda. †

In her capacity as Co-ordinating Chaplain at the Darwin Prison, the Rev Felicity Amery arranged for some of the prisoners to explore what they believe in through art work.

The resulting works of art were displayed to the public at the Casuarina Library. Some of them are also reproduced here. †



The things I believe in.



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Jo have had to carry pain and burdens and tragedy of your own, and I hope that you both have weathered those hard times drawing strength yourself from the incredible good news of the gospel of divine grace that can touch and redeem every loss and imperfect human situation.

A bond we have is that we have all served children and families through the ministries of Somerville Homes.

Four times in retirement, Peg and I have gone back to Mt. Beauty for short-term ministries, and have always heard happy recollections of your ministry there. That is another bond that we have with you. We four are fortunate to have enjoyed life and work in two of the most fascinating places on Earth, the beautiful Kiewa Valley and the magnificent, tolerant, cosmopolitan Top End.

Congratulations on finding and sharing your own unique way of bringing help and hope into others' lives in the name of Christ, and for reaching this milestone on your ongoing vocational journey.

Our daughter Jill sends her greeting and good wishes, with memories of you coming to Darwin in her teens as a 'gentle giant' who would finish a conversation with words such as "The Christ be with you". She also has a happy memory of tea on the beach years later with Jo and Ron on a visit with her husband and children.

I am happy to say that I also remember, as many another would, a pleasant picnic evening on the Nightcliff beach with the Brandts when I was visiting Darwin. Thanks for the memories, and may peace and happiness be yours through all the years to come. Remember that the day

of your retirement is still just "the first day of the rest of your life". ✚

The Ron Brand—the script!

Consultation between God (George Woodward) and the angel Gabriel (Jim Downing).

Intro: Tonight we are using different ways to celebrate the ministry of Ron and Jo Brandt among us over so many years here in the Northern Synod. Two unlikely characters have arrived from the other world to help with the celebration.

Gabriel: Sorry God. I was bringing my harp as you asked, but the strings broke. But no worries, I have a replacement. [*Plays Waltzing Matilda on mouth organ.*]

God: That was great Gabe! This is the great hymn of Australia, isn't it! Do you think the people here know who they are?

Gabriel: Yes God they know alright. They are all dinki di Aussies. They know that hymn. But, God; you can't appear before people with those scruffy thongs on. Have you forgotten who you are, the great I AM?

God: It's alright Gabriel. These are my holy thongs. (*Holds them up to show large hole worn through each*) They are an important religious symbol of this great country. Now what are we here for Gabriel?

Gabriel: Excuse me God. You're on the wrong track. Did you hear about a terrific baby just born to a couple in Victoria.

God: Why do people bother me with trivialities? A couple of million babies have been born today. I'm beginning to regret I gave human beings freedom to choose and the ability to

reproduce. It's all they think about. Of course I know this baby. Why do you think he's so special?

Gabriel: Have you seen him? He should be lined up for something really important.

God: Of course I've seen him. I made him didn't I? I make everyone special, but I'll have to watch this one. I'm not sure what will happen with him. Have you had a good look at the kid? He'll have a chest that will cost him a fortune in shirts, and a voice to loosen the foundations of the earth.

Gabriel: But you'll have to use him. He's larger than life.

God: That's what bothers me. Ever since I made them, humans have challenged me constantly. This one will end up thinking he's bigger than me.

Gabriel: Yes, but think of sermons delivered with that voice. Even now it drowns out all the others in maternity. And he won't have people arguing with him.

God: Yes, but I don't want people browbeaten into following him instead of me. I'll have to give him a couple of hiccups to slow him a little. A little tweak of the liver – not S.O.L. mind. He'll be large and generous hearted, but we'll just tweak the heart slightly to slow him a bit. Like I fixed up Paul the Apostle way back when I was here, with that thorn in the flesh.

Gabriel: But you'll want him to have a useful ministry. What will you do?

God: We'll make him a gentle giant, so that he won't scare people. Mind you, I might have slipped up with this one. He could turn out to be a bit scary.

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He will need a brand name. Got any thoughts? Advertising bores me.

Gabriel: How does this sound? **"Use the Ron Brand. Wipe your mind clean of old mouldering theological concepts."**

God: You've got it. But we'll have to make sure everyone doesn't end up on the edge of the raft; and we need to make sure that the 'Ron Brand' doesn't have everyone thinking that there is no past. "This is the first day of the rest of your life" is an important concept, but taken to its extreme we could end up with a revolution.

Gabriel: You need to add another warning. "Warning! "The use of this cleaner may replace those old theological labels with a new set."

What about this? "Wipe your mind clean of old decaying theology. "Use 'Ron Brand' with the Jo additive."

God: Yes. Use of the Jo additive will moderate the effects of the Ron Brand, giving it a gentler impact. It will remove any harsh effects of the cleaner on the hands and mind, and give a final brilliant gleam.

Gabriel: Maybe we should use a slogan like this. "Ron Brand cleaner's special stimulant additive will have you living on the edge of the raft". I seem to remember Jo having to pull him away from the edge on occasion.

God: Try this one. 'Remember, this is the first day of the rest of your world'. We'd better add 'Cleaners can become a little weaker with age. Use a new cleaner in every generation'. But Gabrielle, I'm sure this one will work out OK. Now what about some heavenly music to finish up.

Gabriel: OK. I'll call the choir together.

God: [stands up].

Gabriel: God, you sit down. You can't be part of the choir. You can't sing.

God: But I can do anything.

Gabriel: No you can't. I read it in Philippians. You put some limits on yourself.

God: OK. Go for it! ✚



Synod in session: (l—r) Kevin Davis, Steve Orme, Mawunydjil Garawirrtja.

Continued from page 20.

Synod reflections ...

And from Nightcliff's lay representative, first-timer, Fiona Hughes:

The theme for this year's Synod was "Forward Together in the Love of Christ".

Throughout the meeting the practical reality of being together, thinking together, talking together and moving ahead together was clear. Significant parts of the meeting included the Synod's new strategic framework, the allocation of budget for new initiatives, forging and revisiting covenant relationships, updates on how we are working together internationally and at home, and the progress of Uniting Church agencies, chaplains and schools.

Most important was the continuous discussion threaded throughout Synod – publicly (with the forum on Tuesday night), collaboratively and privately. This brought a practical aspect to this year's theme as "an affirmation that we are committed to going forward into the future together because of the bonds of love we have in Christ, even though we might not have an answer to what our future will be and even though we are a diverse group" (Moderator,

Rev. Steve Orme). By the way, it was fantastic to see our 'Nightcliff crowd' at the forum!

The Synod however, wasn't without new flavours, with the showcase and experience of the new *Uniting in Worship 2* material in morning devotions led by Rev. Dr Paul Walton, and the meaningful preaching of Rev. Sealin Garlett. In the daily bible studies with Sealin, members of Synod were challenged to 'cross over the line' and 'let God have the stage'.

As a first-timer at Synod, I found myself truly blessed in outlook and experience. It was eye-opening how Synod conducts its business. There was room for genuine consultation, listening, and talking – a unique and outstanding example to the community on how diversity is strength. I am much more aware of the perspectives and contexts within which our agencies operate, and I valued the process of arriving at tangible action with outcomes which will hopefully be visible to those who we represent. Thank you for the opportunity to participate! ✚

First-timers reflect on Synod '05

Thoughts from the General Secretary

This was the first Synod meeting that I had ever attended, let alone being the first as Synod Secretary. I wasn't too sure what to expect. Now that the Synod has concluded, my views of what took place are mixed. Mostly, I am quite pleased with the way the Synod went.

Highlights for me included the opening service in the University's Chinese Garden. The theme was a multicultural service aptly fitting into the beautiful garden. The participation of the different cultural groups was inspirational.

The Tuesday evening Public Forum was a great success. More than 250 people attended to listen to the topic 'Living in Australian Community with Religious Diversity'. The whole evening was deemed a great success.

The bible studies led each day by the Rev Sealin Garlett were inspirational. Sealin took us through Psalm 139, Search me O God, and related the Psalm to his own personal life and Christian journey and challenged us to explore ourselves deeply as God would explore us.

Our devotions were conducted by Rev Dr Paul Walton. Paul led us through *Uniting in Worship, Book 2*, which has just been released. *Uniting in Worship Book 2* looks very exciting with a huge range of stimulating resources in a book, CD disc and DVD.

The Synod dealt with the financial report and the proposed changes to our budgeting process. Two important decisions were made by the Synod. The first was to agree

to reduce our dependence upon the Assembly Grant by weaning ourselves from that Grant over a period of ten years and introducing a new initiatives budget item so that congregations and agencies could make applications for seed funds for new ministry developments.

The Synod also agreed to restructure the Finance and Property Services Committee. I thank the members of the former Finance and Property Services Committee for their sterling work and welcome the new committee as it is about to commence its duties.

The Synod examined a statement about education but ran out of time to conclude the debate. Our Aboriginal friends were very keen to talk about more support in Aboriginal communities by the church. This topic will be ongoing and it will be dealt with by the Standing Committee. A proposal not debated due to time restrictions is the notion that some kind of inquiry committee be set up to look into the concerns Aboriginal people have of education in their communities.

We started a process of a new covenant between Northern Regional Council of Congress and Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia. This will be ongoing but I believe that a real process of living out a covenant has begun. The concept of Sister Churches is being discussed. I look forward to that process continuing.

What concerned me most about the Synod meetings was the problem of translation for various Aboriginal and other cultural groups. We did not do that

very well and the only translation we did was for the eastern Arnhemland people, although there were many other groups that should have been catered for. This caused me some concern as I believe that we should cater for all groups, including our Indonesian friends. At the next Synod I am proposing that we do something to rectify this problem and am exploring the possibility of simultaneous translation using head sets.

The Synod accepted a mission and vision statement as presented by the Standing Committee. We did not, however, conclude all the statements that were put forward to the Synod regarding our view of education, social justice and community service. Those statements will continue to be discussed by the Standing Committee.

Mission Statement

As part of the Uniting Church in Australia the mission of the Northern Synod is to proclaim, promote and live out the reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit, transforming people and communities in which God calls us to worship, witness and serve.

Vision

To achieve our mission, we commit to following Jesus, living together and going forward together in the love of Christ.

In all the Synod was very active and I appreciated greatly the support people provided to make it happen and I thank all the delegates who attended and participated in the Synod. †

- Kevin Davis, General Secretary

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Refugee thanksgiving service

On October 2 in Adelaide at Pilgrim Uniting Church a service of thanksgiving was held for asylum seekers who had been released from detention.

Our church, through many different members, has been visiting, writing to, telephoning, lobbying on behalf of and caring for, in a variety of ways, asylum seekers for years, all over the country in cities and remote areas. I became involved by visiting people in the Curtin Detention Centre near Derby from 2000 to 2002 (when it closed). All the asylum seekers with whom the church has been directly involved have now been released. It was decided therefore that we should hold a thanksgiving service in Adelaide (closest city to Baxter Detention centre where most have been lately) to celebrate and give thanks to God. I had not seen Curtin detainees for three years and so I was not going to miss out!!

The day started with a baptism. One of the refugees (they have been released because they are acknowledged as refugees) who had been released for a few months had continued his interest in the Christian faith and had decided to commit his life to following Jesus. He had been at Curtin and so wanted some involvement from me as a symbol that Curtin was part of his journey. I was to pour the water into the font. However it was uncertain as to whether I would be there on time as my plane was scheduled to arrive in Adelaide only 25 minutes before the service started. I walked in the door of the church as the minister was handing the jug of water to my stand-in. I walked straight to the front and the service continued as planned.

In the afternoon we all met at the

hall just to have catch-up time. It was fantastic to see so many familiar faces, to realise they were not accompanied by guards, to see so many smiles and laughter, to see freedom embodied in joy. Later we had the service itself which was very moving. Significant songs were sung, stories told, prayers of thanks, prayers for those still in detention, prayers for the long hard journey still ahead and celebration as we released doves into the air in a gesture of freedom from the Iranian culture. In the evening we shared a meal and shared some more stories and entertainment.

There are still many struggles ahead. Many are now experiencing the delayed culture shock of moving from their home country to Australia. They are also experiencing the culture shock from detention to freedom. All are on temporary visas of various kinds, which continue their feelings of uncertainty about the future. Most are still suffering mental illnesses from their long time in detention and all have English as a second language. Despite all these difficulties (and more) there was true joy in people's hearts and a sense of hope for the future particularly knowing that other people of faith are walking alongside them in this difficult time. †

-Rev Andrew Watts

Assembly '03

Since 1998 more than 12000 asylum seekers have come here as boat people from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2003 the UCA Assembly meeting in Melbourne heard reports from those who had worked with asylum seekers and resolved in 03.17.02: TO CONDEMN the Australian government for its plans to forcibly deport Iranian people to a situation where they will face persecution and possibly death. TO ASK members, and especially the President, to act on their behalf and those who were seeking justice for them.

†



L—r: one of the refugees, a Catholic chaplain at the Baxter Detention Facility, Sr Pat Sealey, and UCA President Rev Dean Drayton.

'Lead us not into temptation'

Here is an edited version of the address Assembly President, Rev Dr Dean Drayton, gave at the thanksgiving service for asylum seekers released from detention. The service was in Pilgrim Church, Adelaide, on October 2.

IN THE 1950s the great theologian Karl Barth visited the United States. On arrival he was asked what he would like to see. "I would like to visit a prison," he said, to the surprise of those who welcomed him. "The way a society treats its prisoners reflects the value that society places on human life."

I am glad that Karl Barth cannot visit our detention centres. What would he say about the way we value those who have risked all to escape from terror and threat and on arrival are treated like crimi-

Continued on next page

nals, and locked up in detention?

I CAN still hardly believe we are here holding this thanksgiving service for asylum seekers released from mandatory detention. Six months ago we faced a powerful government resistant to all voices of dissent against what it was doing to people in detention. Today, while mandatory detention remains, the work of so many has brought modifications that help lessen a little its destructiveness. Slowly the truth has emerged from the shadows such that now it is DIMIA that has to work hard to be heard.

THE UNITING Church continues to oppose the mandatory detention system, the wasteful Pacific Solution, and the denial of human rights by preventing those on Temporary Visas from working and receive support. As year follows year, the names of detention centres such as Baxter and Port Hedland are being burned into a story that Australia will not forget. They are becoming a symbol of the way this government operates.

THOSE released from Baxter asked for the reading of the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. In this multifaith and ecumenical service, we must focus on the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and the merciful, for here Jesus encourages the powerless to hear that God is for them.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus summarises the way one is to live before this God in what has become known as the Lord's Prayer. It is a pilgrim's prayer, always looking to the future with a divine perspective. But it has an amazing structure.

I WANT to focus on the last petition of the Lord's Prayer. It can be read two ways, either "save us

from the time of trial", or "lead us not into temptation". Read the first way and it is part of the plea of every asylum seeker. Read the second way, and it can include us all as a nation. "Lead us not into temptation."

BEFORE we focus on the petition, I want to share the truth that came home to me when teaching my daughter this prayer. I had said, "Now dear, each line really begins with the address "Our Father". (Now I would say father/mother to ease the pain of some people's experience.)

She listened patiently as I prefixed each petition of the prayer with this beginning. Then she said, "You mean the Lord's Prayer is like a target. If you get God right in the centre all else falls into place in a series of circles?" Who was teaching who, I thought.

THE LAST petition then, is the outer one. From God, to God's purposes, daily bread for us, forgiveness given and received; then there is the last, save us and deliver us from evil. The shadows lurk around the edges, and we ask God to deliver us from this evil.

Here one is forced to live on the shadowy edge of society. When God's provision is not justly received we then move onto the need for forgiveness by communities and individuals; and when forgiveness is not given we have to face the consequences of hardened community and individual attitudes. What a terrible place to be.

THOSE who have lived through the mandatory detention system know what it means to pray "save us from the time of trial". The end of a dangerous voyage of new beginnings was the beginning of detention. The hope that held people together through the trip was devastated

by what followed. Imprisoned in remote places, some for up to five or six years, treated like criminals, challenging a system that never had to give reasons for what they did, leaving the anxiety of having to legally fight rulings court by court.

OVER a thousand people harmed themselves, were pushed to riots, hunger fasts, caught by depression, had families torn apart, and people hunted down. In the midst of this there emerged for many a searching for belief, and for some new ways to believe. For most who remained Moslems, and about a 100 who became Christian, this was a time which shook them to the very core of their humanity.

ONLY in the last year has the Australian public come to see what we have wreaked upon others, and then only because it happened to an Australian citizen, Cornelia Rau (and as it turned out to many more as well). And even then it was an asylum seeker who, out of concern, raised the alarm with authorities as to what was happening to her.

IT WAS untrue for the government to sell to the Australian public that asylum seekers were queue jumpers, and that boat people were more of a security threat than others coming to this country via visa. And the government has consistently refused to consider moving to complementary protection, as the United Nations suggests, and stuck to the older definition of a refugee, that avoids considering the issues of the violation of human rights and the threat to citizens from civil wars in their own country.

AND THEN, principally because of the care of Frontier Service Patrol ministers visiting the desert detention centres, those among

the asylum seekers approached them asking questions about the Christian faith. Some, after a long process, were baptized. This genuine search for meaning and faith in detention centres eventually led to the formation of a "UCA National Register of Baptized Members in Detention Centres". As well as speaking on behalf of all asylum seekers the UCA clearly had an added responsibility to act on their behalf. Though the register had to be kept from public gaze because of the risk to those on it, we were able to make presentations to the Minister on this matter and were encouraged by her efforts.

TODAY we celebrate the release from detention of many Iranians and some people from Afghanistan, and give thanks to God for this day of Freedom. All on the UCA register are now free. But it is only the beginning, because the fears and psychological effects go on and on. Yet the new possibilities are to be enjoyed, the joy of being with others, family, and work, the simplest and some of the best pleasures.

THIS other way of translating this passage is a word for us and our nation's leaders. "Lead us not into temptation". Bonhoeffer in his book *Temptations* explains that temptation here is the act of us living life for our own ends rather than living life in relation to the fundamental centre of all life found in God. The temptation is to let some pay the price of injustice for the benefit of the rest.

AS WE reflect on the past five years, I believe we should say to those who govern our nation and build detention centres, "Lead us not into Temptation as a nation." Do not let the fear of the 'other', the unknown, lead us to build higher walls of a fortress Australia, and cast others into our

deserts. Do not let the fear of religious extremists cast a pall over the authenticity of those who worship. Do not sow too great a fear of terrorism to cripple our experience of liberty and freedom.

IN THESE matters the Australian government has for too long closed its eyes to those who have paid the price of their policies. Our democratic nation must not let one group of people suffer to assuage our fears. It is too often expedient that someone or some group should die for the people so that the nation does not perish – as Caiaphas calculated the removal of Jesus whom he saw as a threat (John 11:49,50).

IT IS easy for high sounding words to give reasons why a particular group is put at a disadvantage, but the test is in the consequences. The proof of the pudding is not so much in the eating as the digesting. It has been the experience of seeing the consequences of mandatory detention that has revealed the shadow side of this policy. When so much is deliberately hidden from public view how can the checks and balances work? It is more difficult to get information. My encounters with the representatives of DIMIA were kafkaesque. Lead us not into the temptation as a nation to let PR and bland assurances be our truth. Elected leaders, lead us not into temptation as a nation. ☩
- Rev Dean Drayton.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Rev Ebenhaizer Imanuel Nuban Timo, Vice Moderator of the Evangelical Church of Timor was present at Synod. The Indonesian members of the Northern Synod were delighted that he was able to be present, as were

non-Indonesian members of the Church.

In the past, Moderators of the Northern Synod and others have been privileged to attend the Timorese Synod.



Rev Eben Timo with Gen Sec Kevin Davis at Synod.



Rev Eben Timo and Rev Thresi Mauboy of the Indonesian Missionary Congregation

ADVANCE NOTICE

Next Issue of NSN ...

**Focus on the Eastern Region—
Palmerston, Living Water,
Jabiru, Arnhem Land.**

Beginning with the first 2006 issue the Northern Synod News will be focusing on a different region with each issue. The regular features will remain—and issues of significance will be reported - but we want input from YOU!

See the back page for the deadline

Provocations ... ideas to make you think



I know the human race is not going to suddenly be converted to Christ, but that does not keep me from preaching [Christ]. **I also know the nations are not going to suddenly lay down their arms, but that does not keep us from doing all we can before it is too late.**

Billy Graham



There is nothing more dangerous than to build a society, with a large segment of people in the society who feel they have no stake in it - who feel that they have nothing to lose. People who have a stake in their society protect their society, but when they don't have it, they unconsciously want to destroy it.

Martin Luther King



Those who wait till evening for sunrise will discover that they have lost the day.

Elizabeth Hamilton



Life only demands from you the strength you possess.

Dag Hammarskjöld



He who would leap high must take a long run.

Danish proverb.



The Future never just happened. It was created.

Will & Ariel Durant



To make a great dream come true you must first have a great dream.

Hans Selye



Say alleluia always, no matter the time of day, no matter the season of life.

St Benedict of Nursia



Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.

Confucius



Vanity asks the question—is it popular?

Conscience asks the question—is it right?

Martin Luther King Jr



If you're not beguiling by the age of twelve, forget it.

Lucy. Charles Schulz.



Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit.

Peter Ustinov



I walk slowly but I never walk backward.

Abraham Lincoln



The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it.

Henri Nouwen



Two men look out through the same bars; one sees the mud and one the stars.

Frederick Langbridge



Bad habits are easier to abandon today than tomorrow.

Yiddish proverb



Choose your rut carefully—you'll be in it for the next ten miles!

New York State road sign



Honour has not to be won. It must only not be lost.

Arthur Schopenhauer



The lesser evil is also evil.

Naomi Mitchison



What is beautiful is good and who is good is also beautiful.

Sappho



Being oppressed means the absence of choices.

Bell Hooks



Prosperity proves the fortunate; adversity the great.

Pliny the Younger



**Next Edition of *Northern Synod News*
February 2006.
Focus on Eastern region.**

**Deadline for articles:
JANUARY 12th, 2006.**

To contribute news items or articles contact the Editor, NSN ...
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c/- Synod Office or
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Diary Dates

May the joy and peace of Christmas be with each and everyone of you.



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