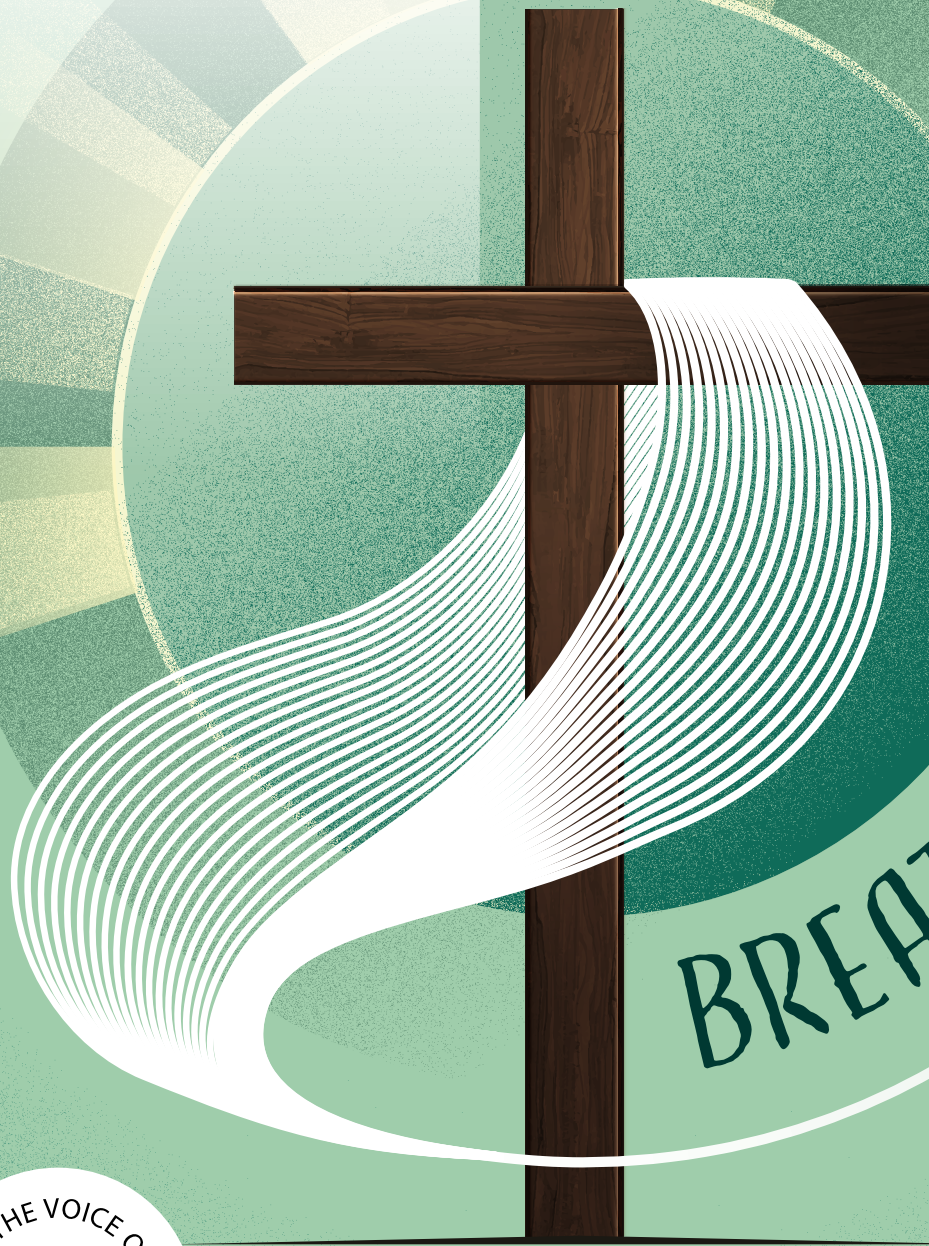




The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

New Times

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BREATHING NEW LIFE

THE VOICE OF THE
UNITING CHURCH IN SA •
FREE

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A feather on the breath of God

Editorial



"... it pleased the king to lift a small feather from the ground, and he commanded it to fly. Yet a feather does not fly because of anything in itself, but because the air bears it along. Thus am I; a feather on the breath of God ... relying completely on Him."

Almost a thousand years after the Abbess Hildegard of Bingen wrote these words, they seem more relevant than ever. In our busy lives, driven by to do lists and the ever-helpful calendar on our mobile phones (to many of us, our most constant companions), it's all too easy to forget to be that feather; to let God's breath blow through our lives, lifting us and carrying us where it will.

Every Easter season we are invited to remember the way in which God breathes new life into each of us and into all creation through the coming of Jesus. In this edition of New Times, the Moderator and General Secretary explore different ways of thinking about the breath of God.

Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly being recognised as major public health issues. Mark Waters' article considers the causes of loneliness and those who may suffer from it, and explores possible solutions. We then look at three examples of the wonderful work our congregations are doing to encourage intergenerational connections.

In other items, we celebrate two new Ministers beginning their ordained ministries, and others who minister to their congregations and communities in so many different ways, such as through leadership, lay preaching, music, writing and volunteering for UnitingCare, just to name a few.

It is an honour and privilege to have the opportunity to be the new Editor of New Times. A huge thank you to my amazing team, and to Emelia who so ably picked up the reigns for the previous edition.

Joy and peace,

Clive
Clive Conway
Editor



Listen to
Hildegard's
music
YouTube

Letting go and receiving

Moderator's Message

During this Easter season and as we continue our journey of faith throughout the year, I am hoping we might all take time to reflect on the ways in which God breathes new life into and through us as individual followers of Jesus, and as Christian communities locally, nationally and globally.

I commend the General Secretary's reflection in this issue of New Times, as he explores the theme of 'breath' from the point of view of creation, crucifixion and resurrection.

In broad terms, I have been thinking of *relinquishment* and *receptivity*.

In Jesus 'giving up his spirit' (John 19:30) I see an act of relinquishment. In Jesus' journey to the cross and ultimately in this moment, we comprehend His supreme love and obedience which opens the path to reconciliation between God and humankind.

Jesus' relinquishment is a definitive action of letting go and trusting in the purposes and power of God. This letting go challenges us to move from the tendency to cling to our own assumptions and understanding and to become more aware of the movement of the Spirit of God, the very breath of God which breathes New Life!

In the resurrection narratives of John's gospel, we move from Jesus' instruction to Mary that she 'not hold on to him', to Jesus breathing on his disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit". This act of empowerment and commissioning invites the disciples to be receptive to the transformative work of God. This receptivity requires an open heart and a willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit. It is an acknowledgment of our dependence on God. Receptivity is not a passive disposition – it is an active engagement with God's purposes which calls for prayer, meditation, and a deep communion with God, allowing His spirit to work within us and through us.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to cultivate this receptivity, being attuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and responsive to God's call.

In my experience as a Hospital Chaplain, I sat many times with people who were struggling for breath and was sometimes with them when they breathed their last breaths. On some occasions breathing would be supported with 'high flow oxygen therapy'. This was a time which reflected a sense of urgency and uncertainty and was a somewhat temporary measure. In contrast, when we think of God breathing new life, it is



Breathe on me, breath of God.
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with thee I will be one,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835-1889)



Listen to the song



YouTube

Breathe on me, breath of God
Reawaken Hymns

not uncertain nor temporary. It is, however, a reliance upon God's life-sustaining presence which encourages growth and transformation. At the same time, it challenges the temptation and tendency to more frantic efforts to maintain spiritual vitality.

While writing this reflection, I have been playing the age-old hymn, 'Breathe on me, breath of God' and I encourage you to take time to meditate upon the resurrection and crucifixion narratives, along with these timeless words of invitation and dependence on the breath of God.

If you are reading this article online, you can listen to a very moving version of this hymn via the following link (<https://tinyurl.com/3rkz6bpf>) or using the QR Code above.

God's Grace and joy-filled blessings,

Peter

Rev Peter Morel
Moderator

BREATHING NEW LIFE

General Secretary's message

Rev Philip Gardner



The Moderator's theme for this Easter season is 'Breathing New Life'. This is a theme that runs through Scripture, beginning with the story of creation when God breathes spirit into the lungs of the first humans and brings them to life (Genesis 2:7). In this reflection though, I want to particularly focus on John's description of the death of Jesus.

In John 19:30, Jesus is given wine, announces, "It is finished", bows his head and "gives up his spirit". Now, "giving up his spirit" could simply be a synonym for his death – "he breathed his last". However, there is the possibility that it includes the meaning that he "breathed out his spirit", bestowing his Spirit on the community of his followers.¹ This is congruent with Jesus' actions after the resurrection when he breathes upon the disciples saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). I think it is helpful to see this resurrection action foreshadowed in his last breath upon the cross.

Sometimes in books I read and conversations I share in, I get the sense that some people tend to separate the life and ministry of Jesus, the cross and the resurrection into discrete segments. In all the gospels though, and particularly in John's gospel, there is a unity to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Each part of the life of Jesus is sounding in other parts. For example, in paragraph three of the Basis of Union, Jesus is described as the "risen, crucified One". I have been in a number of conversations where people have been surprised at that order of words, thinking it makes more sense to have it chronologically – "crucified, risen One", but it is a reminder that the resurrection doesn't erase the crucifixion; the risen Jesus continues to carry the scars of his death; the servanthood and self-giving of his ministry continue to be part of the meaning of resurrection.

This is all a reminder that the Spirit of new life breathed into our lives is the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit is at work in our lives forming, conforming and transforming us into the likeness of Jesus; growing in us love and joy, peace and patience. The Spirit is calling us into the way of Jesus; inviting us into the way of making peace, working for reconciliation and serving our neighbour.

'Breathing New Life' is not just an inspiring concept in Scripture. For example, many parts of Christian tradition invite us to pay attention to our breathing, stilling ourselves to be present to God and to receive the Spirit of new life, the Spirit of Jesus. This can take place in sustained times of prayer and meditation, or in briefer moments, snatched throughout the day, when we pause, slow down our breathing and pay attention to the spirit of Jesus in us, and around us. This Easter season, may you know the spirit of Jesus transforming you into his likeness, animating and refreshing your life.

¹For a helpful reflection on this, see the excellent book by Australian Catholic scholar Brendan Byrne, "Life Abounding: A Reading of John's Gospel" (Collegville: Minnesota; 2014) p. 321.

A stronger, fairer Australia for all. *Together we can.*



On Thursday March 6 this year, UnitingCare Australia launched its Federal Election 2025 Policy Platform.

The cost-of-living pressures on families, households and individuals are being felt across all UnitingCare agencies throughout the country. Rent rises, food relief, electricity prices and underemployment contribute to Australians doing it tough, but there are some on income support that are doing it even tougher than others.

We are calling upon all candidates in the upcoming 2025 election to consider two key propositions from the UnitingCare Australia campaign:

- Ensuring a strong and adequate safety net – no-one on income support should be being left behind
- Strengthening Community Support Services – currently, many community organisations recognise that there is significant unmet need.

"Too many Australians are being left behind. This is not just a question of economics; it's about fairness, dignity and the kind of society we want to be," said Claerwen Little, National Director of UnitingCare Australia. "The current crisis calls for bold leadership and compassionate policies that ensure everyone receives the support they need, when and where they need it".

Mark Waters, Director of UnitingCare SA and a member of the UnitingCare Australia Board stated, "With 2024 figures from Foodbank indicating that 30% of households are struggling to put food on the table, it is clear that the needs of the community are great. Massive rent increases proportionally hit people on benefits or low incomes the greatest. I encourage all caring people across the church to ask their local candidates about what they will do to support increases to Job Seeker and community service to fill those gaps in services".

To support the campaign, UnitingCare Australia has produced a range of materials with the theme, 'A stronger, fairer Australia for all. Together, we can'. These resources include the platform, the pre-election media release, social media tiles, and website or email banners.



Download the toolkit for
*A stronger, fairer
Australia for all.*

Please contact Mark Waters at mwaters@sa.uca.org.au or on 8236 4276 to be sent the full suite of resources.



Ordination of Travis Turner and Elissa Inglis

*By Steph Tai
Secretary, Generate Presbytery*

Temperatures outside soared, but nothing could melt the nervous excitement of Travis Turner and Elissa Inglis as they walked up the steps to be ordained at the Generate Presbytery gathering at Burnside City Uniting Church in March.

For both ordinands the journey of discernment and formation had been more challenging and transformative than anticipated. They'd been stretched beyond their comfort, given opportunities they felt unprepared for, and developed growing capacity for ministry.

I'd had the privilege of being a small part of their journeys and was honoured to be asked to preach at the service. As I was preparing, I remembered sitting on the steps of the Golden Grove Arts Centre listening to a much scrawnier young Travis begin to open up about a sense of call he was wrestling with. I also remember meeting Elissa as part of the Presbytery of SA's Period Of Discernment (POD) Panel to hear about her journey and her discernment that she was "definitely not called to ordained ministry".

Ordinations are always times for celebration. It was incredible to hear of the sheer breadth of people who have been a part of their journey. Those who offered words of encouragement or wisdom, invited them into intentional spaces, prayed for them, gave them opportunities to stretch and learn, and those who saw more in them than they did in themselves – it truly takes the whole body of Christ to form a Minister.

It is an incredible thing to see when someone realises that the stirring, unsettling, longing within them is God at work. I have a deep love for every member ministry, but there is something special about the work of God in calling people into ordained ministry.

Congratulations to Travis and Elissa on starting this exciting next stage of their journeys!



Exploring the call to ministry

Currently the UCA SA is experiencing a drastic shortage of ministry agents (ordained Ministers and Pastors). We have many open placements and a growing number of ministry agents eligible for retirement in the next few years.

Paragraph 14 of the Basis of Union says: *The United Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognise among its members men and women called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world.*

I don't believe that God has stopped calling, but maybe we haven't been as open and active as we might be in recognising that call. The invitation is to change that. To pray that God will use you as an encourager in someone's call journey, like so many were for Elissa and Travis.

If you or someone you know is interested in exploring a possible call to ministry, contact your Presbytery's POD Coordinator.

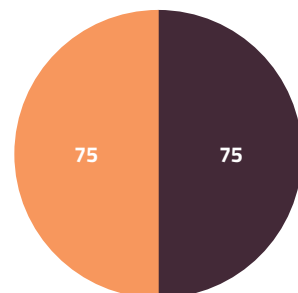
Generate: Rev Andy Hogarth andy@journeyuc.com

PoSSA: Max Howland maxhowland23@gmail.com

Wimala: Rev Ann Phillips anncphillips10@gmail.com

We currently have 150 ministry agents. Half of those will be over retirement age in the next 7 years.

Retirement age



■ Retire in or before 2032

■ Retire after 2032



Resthaven celebrates its 90th anniversary

By Lydia Wallis

Senior Communications Officer, Resthaven

Resthaven is proud to celebrate 90 years of service to older people across South Australia in 2025.

Darren Birbeck, Resthaven CEO says, "Resthaven was formed during the Great Depression, from the belief that older women who had served the church all their lives deserved charitable accommodation as they aged.

"Members of the Methodist Church set about establishing this home, and 'Rest Haven' was officially opened on 11 May 1935 by Lady Isabel Kidman, wife of the prominent pastoralist, Sir Sidney Kidman.

"Providing aged care for just a handful of residents, demand for Resthaven's services grew quickly. Today, Resthaven has 12 residential aged care homes, 23 community service locations across Adelaide and regional South Australia, and 31 retirement living villages".

Speaking at the official 'opening' of Resthaven's 90th anniversary, held at Resthaven's Head Office at Wayville, Board President Mark Porter said, "Like the elderly people we serve, organisations age differently. Some lose their vision; some their strength and vigour; and some even lose their identity. Fortunately, that's not the case with Resthaven. From its humble beginnings in 1935 until today,

Resthaven has remained committed to its faith, its purpose, and its values".

A not-for-profit aged care community service associated with the Uniting Church in Australia, Resthaven's operations and revenue are solely focused on its core purpose of 'Working together: outstanding care and support for older people and their carers'.

Every day, Resthaven shares the lives and wisdom of older people and their carers, opening doors to the full range of aged care service options available. Services are provided throughout metropolitan Adelaide, the Adelaide Hills, Murraylands, Riverland, Fleurieu Peninsula, lower Barossa region and the Limestone Coast of South Australia.

Darren Birbeck added, "Ninety years ago, Resthaven started a tradition of providing quality care, support and accommodation to older people in South Australia. That proud tradition lives on".

A series of events, activities and concerts to celebrate Resthaven's 90th anniversary will be held across all of Resthaven's residential, community services and retirement lifestyle sites throughout the year, including a Service of Thanksgiving at Malvern Uniting Church on 11 May.

A full list of the public events is available on the Resthaven website (<https://www.resthaven.asn.au/events/>).



A Podcast Series on Pope Francis' Encyclical

Compiled by members of the SA Uniting Church-Roman Catholic Dialogue Team.



Listen to the podcast

SoundCloud – Fratelli Tutti

Editor's note: I've listened to this podcast series and I found them interesting, thought provoking and professionally presented – Clive.



We live in a world fraught with suffering, unrest, tragedy and global suspicion. What do we think about this and how can we offer a way of response, personally and socially?

The South Australian Dialogue of the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches has been meeting since 1979.

Some fruits of the dialogue have been a deeper appreciation of each other's traditions, a discussion of many topics of mutual interest, the preparation of several papers and efforts to communicate with the wider Christian community.

Over the last year, the group, which is comprised of members of both the Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches, has been reading and discussing Pope Francis' third encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, or 'Brothers and Sisters All', published in 2020.

Inspired by the teachings of St Francis of Assisi, *Fratelli Tutti* envisions how camaraderie and social friendship can build a more just and peaceful world in the post-pandemic era.

It's written as a universal aspiration for all Christians, in fact, for everyone concerned about our world.

It is in this spirit that members of the dialogue team paired up to introduce and reflect on *Fratelli Tutti* in a series of 10 podcasts. The podcasts are presented by different members of the dialogue team and range in length from 2 to 6 minutes.

The podcast series can be found on SoundCloud here: <https://tinyurl.com/ye2yv6hj> or by using the QR Code to the left.

Introducing the 2025 Synod Standing Committee

We continue our series introducing the 2025 Synod Standing Committee, and getting to know the gifts and talents of its members.



Jethro Buxton
Generate Presbytery

Where do you worship?

Coromandel Valley Uniting Church.

What's your current role?

Ministry of Pastor – Youth, Young Adults and Hospitality.

Why did you want to join Standing Committee?

I want to make a difference. I'm passionate about the church in this state and deeply hopeful for its future. This is a pivotal time for us to think strategically about where God is leading us, rather than focusing solely on where we've been, and I feel called to be a part of the church's future.

What are you looking forward to on Standing Committee this year?

I'm looking forward to gaining a deeper understanding of how God is at work in our state, building relationships with fellow members of the Synod Standing Committee, and becoming aware of the many unsung heroes of our church faithfully serving behind the scenes.

What are the key issues you think the Uniting Church in SA is facing?

As a church, we can sometimes find ourselves looking too much to the past. Union was a significant moment in our history, and while it's good to honour where we've come from, we must remember that we are a pilgrim people – called to journey forward in faith. I'm far more excited about where God is leading us than simply where we've been.

We are also a movement built on committees, which can sometimes slow us down. My hope is that we would become a church of action – bold in sharing our faith, planting new churches, and creating opportunities to raise up the next generation of leaders. Let's step forward with trust, ready to follow where God is calling us next.



Andrew Telfer
Presbytery of Southern SA

Where do you worship?

Seacliff Uniting Church.

What's your current role?

I'm a retired Police Superintendent and, as part of the joy of retirement, am able to choose what voluntary roles I take on. In addition to various local (Church Council, Safe Church, etc.) and Synod church activities, these currently include advocacy work for a just peace for Palestine and Israel and driving a community bus for my local council.

Why did you want to join Standing Committee?

I was surprised when, in 2022, it was suggested to me that I might consider nominating for the Committee. As I thought about this, the classic response of "Why me?" gradually changed to "Why not me?" and I developed a strong feeling that, with about 20 years in police management and other diverse experiences, maybe I could make a positive contribution to the wider working of the church at this level. Having been elected at the 2022 Synod and then learning a great deal about the extent of the work which the Synod undertakes in support of the Uniting Church in SA, I felt I could contribute more by having another term and was re-elected in 2023 and again at the last Synod. The responsibility of being part of the governance of our Church has grown on me and it is a privilege to be able to serve God in this way.

What are you looking forward to on Standing Committee this year?

Continuing to work through the many issues confronting our Church, including the difficult balance faced by many of our faithful congregations as they work through property issues and their mission and planning for the future, and ensuring that the Uniting Church in SA continues to meet the two great commandments of loving God and our neighbour. To be able to do this with good people – professional, committed and respectful – from the Synod office and elected membership makes the task easier.

What are the key issues you think the Uniting Church in SA is facing?

In the big picture, being able to maintain a 'face of God' among the wider community so that, in this changing world, the Christian church is seen as an example of love, respect and justice that others will be drawn to. The need for more ministers and pastors to provide leadership for our congregations and property and finance issues continue to be significant issues.

Loneliness



Mission Resourcing, Uniting Communities and UnitingCare SA are holding conversations about loneliness and social isolation. Hugh Mackay, in his book “The Way We Are”, advocates that “... revitalised neighbourhoods would go some way towards reversing the erosion of social cohesion”.

The next five pages explore Uniting Communities’ research findings and three case studies focusing on intergenerational responses from local congregations.



*By Rachael Pearce
Advocacy Project Officer, Uniting Communities*

Have you thought about or even experienced loneliness recently? With all the other challenges experienced in our community it can be easy to overlook, but growing evidence indicates that loneliness is a significant public health issue, and we should be paying more attention to it.

As an organisation providing vital services to more than 80 thousand South Australians every year, Uniting Communities understands the significant impact that loneliness can have, both on individuals and the broader community. A key part of our strategic plan is to reduce chronic loneliness across the South Australian population by spreading awareness of loneliness and identifying policy solutions.

What is loneliness?

Given the varied experiences of loneliness, there isn't a shared definition in Australia. We often refer to the *Ending Loneliness Together* organisation's definition that says, “Loneliness is a distressing feeling we get when we feel disconnected from other people, and desire more (or more satisfying) social relationships”.

Contrary to common understandings, loneliness often relies on the *meaningfulness* or *quality* of interactions, rather than just the *quantity* of friendships. This explains why people can experience loneliness even when they are among friends.

While feeling temporary feelings of loneliness (called ‘episodic loneliness’) is quite natural, it can become problematic when it is experienced frequently and consistently for a longer period (‘chronic loneliness’). Research shows that chronic loneliness can lead to significant physical and mental health consequences that have been compared to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, as well as increased risks of heart disease, stroke, depression and cognitive decline.



What causes loneliness?

A common misconception is that loneliness results from a personal deficit or failure on the part of the individual when in fact it can result from a range of factors outside our control. Individual factors can include major life events, health and income, and there are other community-wide factors such as fewer opportunities for social connection (activities), difficulty accessing support services and inadequate public transport, just to name a few. There are also 'society-wide' challenges, like our increasingly individualistic society, social and cultural norms (such as the perceived inappropriateness of talking with strangers), and work/life balance challenges (including shift work and overtime).



Who is lonely?

We started our survey research with Square Holes (a cultural and market researcher) in early 2020, to better understand the people most affected by loneliness in South Australia. Uniting Communities has conducted 11 surveys since, asking respondents how often they feel lonely, lack companionship, feel left out or isolated.

The data demonstrates that:

- women are more likely to report loneliness than men
- the higher your income, the less likely it is that you will report chronic loneliness
- On average 57% of South Australians report experiencing loneliness (often or sometimes)
- On average young people aged 18–24 experience the highest rates of loneliness (often or sometimes), as high as 91% in December 2023
- On average, people in their fifties (particularly aged 50–54) experience disproportionately high rates of loneliness (often or sometimes), as high as 74% in March 2021
- On average, rates of loneliness are higher in metropolitan areas than in regional areas although this does vary.

The evidence suggests there is a lack of awareness of loneliness in the community coupled with stigma which could suggest more people are experiencing loneliness but feel unable to report it.

Although older people have not reported high rates of loneliness in our own research, we know from other research that this demographic is particularly affected. This apparent disparity may be because our research is online, and therefore targeting a particular group of older people who are more connected.

Solutions

But what about the solutions? Reducing loneliness will require a whole of community and whole government approach where we all play a part.

There are many ways we as members of the community can champion action to address loneliness, including:

- Creating a culture that actively seeks connection – we can all play a part by actively connecting with others, whether it's talking with a neighbour, volunteering in the community or reaching out to someone we haven't spoken to in a while
- Educating people on the importance of social health – although it is a relatively new concept, 'social health' is gaining more attention as a key measure of overall health alongside physical and mental health

- Spreading awareness of loneliness – a public awareness campaign that draws attention to loneliness and the many people affected by it would help to increase awareness and break down the stigma.

We encourage you to start a conversation with your congregations, whether it is before a service or through the creation of a working group to discuss how your church can help build connections and reduce loneliness.

To find out more about our work and what we ask of our governments, we encourage you to read our *Loneliness by Numbers* report and sign up to our monthly loneliness eNews on our website: <https://www.unitingcommunities.org/loneliness>.

CASE STUDY 1

Young at Heart Intergenerational Playgroup at Unity Hill Uniting Church

*By Rebecca Whillas
Families Pastor, Unity Hill Uniting Church*

Young at Heart Intergenerational Playgroup started in August 2022. The idea was inspired by the ABC TV documentary series 'Old People's Home For 4 Year Olds'. It also flowed out of a passion to see people in the Port Lincoln community have a place to connect with others, focusing particularly on older folk and young families. The idea was to create a safe and vibrant space to give isolated older folk the opportunity to connect with young children and their families.

Each Wednesday afternoon starts with free play where many different activities are set up. This includes craft tables, colouring, playdough, board games, balloon tennis, basketball shooting, dress-ups, and a baby play section. The adults and children move around the room interacting with each other over these activities. This free play time is followed by a group time of action songs, presentation/ interview with a guest artist, and shared fruit. The final part of the afternoon is a cuppa and scones. This is mostly focused on our older folk, but increasingly we are having families join for afternoon tea as well.

Most weeks our core group of participants is a group of children walked from their childcare centre by their carers, and a group of residents from a nursing home who are also accompanied by their carers. With the addition of participants from the community and our helpful volunteers, we often have 70 people filling our church auditorium with laughter and fun.

Young at Heart has grown steadily since its small beginnings in 2022. We meet for the middle eight weeks of each school term and there is genuine sadness expressed when we have a break. Participants have made comments such as:

"I've had a ball! Loved meeting other 'oldies' and especially the kids as I don't have any in my life."

"Had a fabulous time with a special moment with a gorgeous little one. A terrific idea."

"I missed it in the holidays! It's nice to be back."

"I'm going to miss this over Christmas. I have a wonderful time every week."



I am 83 and he is 3. I never thought he could teach me anything new – but he did!"

Young At Heart has been supported by a Uniting Foundations Grant to help buy resources to get started, weekly donated fruit from our local Drakes supermarket, and ongoing donations and support from our Unity Op Shop.

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CASE STUDY 2

Welcome Friday at Malvern Uniting Church

*By Chris McWhirter-Whitlock
Youthworker, Malvern UC*

Friday afternoon means different things to different people. For many of the young people at Malvern Uniting Church, it means attending youth group. To make transport easier, *Welcome Friday* began as an all-ages afternoon tea that began after school, so young people could walk in after school.

With most youth leaders working or at university, this new program was going to need adults who were free earlier in the day. With several retired members in the church community, a unique opportunity presented itself.

Margaret recently moved to Adelaide, settling into the Resthaven across the road. She was pleasantly surprised when she heard a callout for adults to come around after school to sit with the young people as they arrived. Although this act of service was initially for the young people, she herself began to feel just as blessed by the program.

In Margaret's words, "I hope there will always be a chair available in a quiet corner where I can enjoy watching what's going on". Fridays that would otherwise be spent alone in her room were now being spent surrounded by young people and learning what on earth a *Mario Kart* was, as well as the occasional game of *Rummikub*. She sees God at work in the program as this unlikely group of young people gather for community before the youth night begins.

On the other end of the age spectrum, we have teenager Lyana who attends most weeks. "This community has given me a safe space to be myself", she said. "I'm not particularly religious and I'm still allowed there and treated with the same amount of respect ... It's a safe place to fall back on socially when I'm having struggles at home or at school. It's just a place I can trust in general."

James 2:14 says, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?"

We are in an era where the act of providing a space where someone can be seen and loved, even just for two hours, is a very significant deed. Sitting and listening is a powerful act of service, with both generations simply seeking that connection. We can get caught up in making things 'bigger' and 'better'. Sometimes simply giving a space to sit and listen is what's bigger and better.

“It’s a safe place to fall back on socially when I’m having struggles at home or at school. It’s just a place I can trust in general.”

CASE STUDY 3

Grandbuddies

Strengthening intergenerational relationships

By Wendy Perkins

Many people were inspired by the heart-warming series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* on ABC television. The idea of initiating a similar program simmered away in the mind of Lisa Newbury (Early Years Coordinator and Foundation teacher at Pilgrim School, Aberfoyle Park) and Janet Buxton, from the Seniors ministry at nearby Seeds Uniting Church, came on board enthusiastically. The school and local UC congregation have had strong links over more than 40 years, so an intergenerational collaboration seemed to be an exciting next step.

After much planning and preparation, a pilot series of three sessions took place in late 2023. It was enthusiastically received by the children, teachers and families of Pilgrim School as well as by the Seniors who signed up, albeit somewhat nervously at first. Such was the success of the pilot that 'Grandbuddies' was officially launched in 2024 and continues to be an integral and exciting ministry of both school and church.

Each one-hour session consists of a variety of activities, including those which are physical, thinking, creative, literary, musical and even experimental, like seed-planting. The venue alternates between Pilgrim School and Seeds Church, and each child is paired with their Grandbuddy for at least three sessions. There is always much delight as the children reconnect with their buddies and fun, laughter and animated conversations fill the air as they engage in activities together.

When asked what they enjoyed about Grandbuddies, one enthusiastic student exclaimed, "They taught (sic) us to be really focused when we're reading a book!" "We played Snakes and Ladders, and I won – twice!" said another.

Rosemary Parsons, a keen participant from Seeds reflects, "This is an important branch in the education of these children. Some may not have grandparents who live close by or may not come into contact with older people. It could be a shock to them! But it breaks down barriers and helps us all to know how we can care for others. It helps the children to gain trust and confidence as they come to visit us".



"I love the interaction between our lovely seniors and the youngest children," adds Janet Buxton. "Everybody has supported and listened to one another and there is wonderful enrichment coming both ways".

Lisa says, "I see God working through so many different things: relationships building between our Grandbuddies and our little people; and the things we want to role model for our upcoming generation – kindness, love and the unconditional grace which God gives us. It's such a delight, a unique time and has an amazing impact!"

As well as the Foundation children, the Pilgrim Year 6 class also bakes for the seniors, serving up beautiful treats for afternoon tea at the end of the sessions. Many of the Grandbuddies were delighted to attend the Pilgrim School musical in 2024, and their little buddies were excited to have them there watching them perform. There are always joyful reunions when the Foundation students present their nativity play at Seeds, which is regularly attended by the Grandbuddies.

"I think God wants us to be strengthening one another in a program like this," says Janet, "and prayer is the key. We pray that great connections are built and that lives are impacted by the grace and gospel of Jesus".

2025 Missional and Property Questionnaire

By Philip Gardner, General Secretary

We have once again invited the congregations of the SA Synod to participate in a survey where we consider congregational vitality. We first did this in 2022, and the information has proven very helpful. The 2024 Synod meeting resolved to repeat the survey every two years so that we can develop comparative data. There are a few points I would like to make about these questionnaires.

Firstly, thanks to the people who complete the questionnaire. It is extremely useful for us in providing information about where our congregations are strong and what particular issues we need to address. We hope that you might gather your Church Council to answer the questionnaire.

Also, since the last survey we have actively sought feedback on the questions asked and have modified some of the questions and added others accordingly. This is not a major revision because part of the usefulness of asking similar questions is that it is easier to compare information from survey to survey if there is significant congruence.

We are also aware that the last survey in early 2022 occurred as many congregations were continuing to feel the impact of the Covid restrictions. Covid had a significant impact on worshipping numbers as well as making it difficult to plan for the future. While I realise that some congregations continue to experience that impact, others are beginning to regain their confidence and seeing new signs of life. We hope that some of this new confidence will be evident in this year's responses.

Being part of the survey team in 2022/23 and again this time has been most interesting. Thinking through the right questions to ask that might help us uncover some sense of congregational vitality is no easy task, and then how we might frame those questions so that the survey tool can gather information and collate it in useful ways adds another layer of complexity. We were greatly helped by one of our members having professional skills in data analysis and research design.



We decided to use the Basis of Union's description of the life of the Church as worship, witness and service as a frame for developing the questions. Recently in a meeting about the survey we did receive some critique on 'witness'. For some people it smacks of old-fashioned buttonholing – telling people the gospel whether they want to hear it or not. It might strike you as old and conservative, but I still think there is an important place in the mission of the church for verbal witness to the gospel, the good news of the transforming love of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. I would also argue that telling the good news should flow from a life that is centred on seeking to follow Jesus – a life that surprises others with its grace and generosity, compassion and hospitality. Michael Frost's little book 'Surprise the World' invites us to adopt practices that help us live lives that are shaped by Jesus.¹ Witness, when combined with service, invites us to consider how we are living the faith, serving our communities and acting justly.

All that is to say that it isn't easy thinking about how to elicit information about these matters. One of my hopes about the process is that it might prompt church councils to wonder in response to some of the questions raised; maybe even reach out to presbytery or synod leaders to help them think through how they might work on the issues raised by a question in time for the next survey.

So, please keep an eye out for the Questionnaire and thank you in advance to each of you who completes it.

¹ Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (NavPress: 2015)



'Flipping for a Cause' in Hindmarsh Square

By Mark Waters, Director, UnitingCare SA

Shrove Tuesday, March 4 2025, heralded the launch of UnitingCare SA's 'pancake season'. From 7 to 10 am the team set up in Hindmarsh Square with volunteers from the Synod office, Uniting College of Leadership and Theology and the wider community.

Of course, Penny Pancake was there making a guest appearance, Life FM held a live broadcast, Radio Adelaide 891 turned up for a short interview, the RAA Community BBQ team was in overdrive cooking the pancakes, and the competition to see if lemon and sugar, jam and cream or maple syrup was the best topping was on in earnest. *[Surely we all know it's lemon and sugar – Ed.]*

Flyers were being handed out on street corners and in Rundle Mall and as people stepped off their buses, encouraging members of the public to support the Pancake Day fundraising.

Supporters for the Pancake Day 2025 Launch were UC Invest, Red Dove Café, the RAA, Coles, Costco, Romeos and Seed and Stone. By contributing cash sponsorships or donating supplies, these organisations added significant value to the day.

Penny Pancake had a busy day as she also slipped down to St Andrews Hospital later in the morning where she was seen visiting every available ward with the support of the Hospital Chaplain, Jenski and the Moderator, Rev Peter Morel.



While 'fun-raising' is important, the main purpose of the pancake season is to raise awareness and funds for UnitingCare SA Relief Centres to help put food on the table for those who are in need. In 2024, 30% of South Australian metropolitan households struggled to make ends meet and put food on the table for their families (*Foodbank Hunger Report 2024*).

The season of fundraising goes through until the end of June 2025. We encourage you to hold events in your congregations or extend the support through workplaces, schools, sporting and service clubs, etc. Events can be centred around cooking and eating pancakes, but any form of fundraising will be greatly appreciated.

There was no doubt that the objective of raising the profile of Pancake Day, and the work that the Uniting Church is doing in food relief, both came across loud and clear on the day.

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who helped to turn our corner of Hindmarsh Square into a sea of yellow!



Celebrating 30 years of service as a Lay Preacher

By Faye Menadue

Lay Preacher, Murray Bridge Uniting Church

I was brought up in a Christian home, learning more about Jesus through Sunday School, church and youth activities. As a member of the Wynarka Uniting Church in the Karoonda Parish I did all the things that one would expect a Christian to be doing but it was not until 1986, aged 44, that I truly knew Jesus as my intimate friend.

When Rev David Buxton preached on Luke 13:6–9, the parable of the barren fig tree, I had a vision of my life as a dying tree, but the gardener was offering to tend it and revive it so it would produce good fruit. A voice, which I believe was the Holy Spirit, was saying to me, "What are you going to do about it?" After several days I went to the Manse and gave my life fully and totally to Jesus. This was the start of my personal relationship with Jesus. I loved Jesus with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and a joy that overflowed and I wanted share to this with others so they didn't have to wait as long to know Jesus this way.

At the time, Rev Sean Gilbert was encouraging Elders of the church to consider studying a Lay Preacher's course. I responded to Coorong Presbytery and became a Lay Preacher in training. Over the next four years from 1989 I studied externally, one subject each year and gave six assessed church services. In October 1994 I was finally commissioned as a Lay Preacher at a special service at Wynarka.

I was then living in Murray Bridge and became a regular preacher in that congregation. It was my joy and pleasure to encourage others to know Jesus in a personal relationship or to deepen their faith and bear fruit.

On March 9 2025, Max Howland, Synod Lay Preachers Coordinator, presented me with a Certificate in Recognition of Service as an Accredited Lay Preacher for 30 years.

It was a pleasure to celebrate this milestone with a 'thank you' cake over morning tea with the Murray Bridge Congregation and my family.

Celebrating the musical ministry of Dawn Bruce

By Debbie Terrett

Kadina Uniting Church

Kadina Uniting Church celebrated Dawn Bruce's dedicated service through music for the last 30 years and to the community over 70 years when Dawn played at her final service last Christmas Eve.

Dawn started playing publicly in the 1950s, as a young teenager, for her local church at Paskeville on the Yorke Peninsula and then when married, at the Alford Church. Her young children were often in attendance, 'helping' her with the organ controls. In the 1990s, Dawn moved to Kadina where her musical skills were quickly recognised and embraced.

Dawn willingly used and shared her musical talents on so many occasions including regular Sunday playing, funerals, anniversaries, church lunches and more. She also supported other churches, playing for Sunday School anniversaries and special events. In the wider community, Dawn was a regular musician for *Sing Australia* and supported other musicians at performances.

Dawn's love of music shines through her every performance. Worship leaders appreciated Dawn's willingness to share her musical expertise, and nothing was ever too much trouble for her.

Dawn considers her music a God-given gift and feels fortunate to have been able to share that gift whenever she had the opportunity.

Musicians make considerable sacrifices to share their skills with others including providing advice, frequent negotiations, preparation and practice. Often they don't get as much out of a service as the rest of us do, so focused are they on what's musically ahead of them. Now Dawn, after 70 plus years of playing, is able to relax and enjoy every moment of every service!

Congregation Chairperson Yvonne Correll thanked Dawn for her long-term and considerable contributions to our church and the community and presented her with a beautiful bespoke gift made by church member and woodcarver Rob Kutcher from old church pews and featuring music notes, a piano keyboard and her other love – a lawn bowling ball.



Christmas programs on the Yorke Peninsula

By Debbie Terrett

UnitingCare Copper Triangle, based in Kadina and supporting families on the Yorke Peninsula, had a most productive Christmas period.

Our two major programs leading up to Christmas are **Christmas gift-giving** and **food hampers** to help those experiencing financial challenges at this time of the year. With a 25% increase in recipient numbers for both programs, organisers and helpers were extremely busy.

Gift-giving at Christmas time is always a highlight for us as we hear of families receiving their food hampers and the package of beautifully wrapped gifts for children. Christmas is made that much more special because of the volunteers who participate with this program.

Our volunteers make an event out of the activity of sorting and wrapping gifts and filling hampers. They gather in the church hall, undertake their work, share their own stories, enjoy morning tea and, on the final day, Christmas lunch together. This truly reflects the adage that there is much more gained from giving than receiving!



Top: UnitingCare's float for the Kadina Christmas Pageant

Above left: One of our happy wrappers!

Above right: Christmas cakes from Moonta

The incredibly generous local community donates thousands of dollars for both programs. Last year, Moonta Area School's hospitality students made 55 Christmas cakes of various sizes for the hamper program. In addition to studying food preparation and cooking they also learnt about labelling and packaging requirements when sharing food with the public. When the students delivered their hampers to program coordinator Kylie Mildwaters' office, Kylie shared with students the deep need in the community and the huge impact of their generosity.

The work of UnitingCare is regularly promoted through an updated flyer which can be viewed at <https://kadinawallaroo.ucasa.org.au/community-wallaroo/>. In the Kadina Christmas pageant, our float showcasing our slogan 'Locals helping locals' carried goody bags for those watching which included details of our Christmas programs and how to donate to them.

In such challenging times it is wonderful to see the way in which our community and our amazing volunteers support and care for others.

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Letters to the Editor

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or GPO Box 2145, Adelaide 5001



From Margaret Gunn

Dear Editor,

New Times in Summer 2024 offered some insights into the little-acknowledged work of prison/detention centre chaplains.

It included an account of Rev Dr Tom Atherton's experience with the Woomera Detention Centre (1999–2000), and the publication of his private emails, *'A Cry Went Up in the Desert'*.

I have recently learnt of the reaction to this book by a UCA Minister who made weekly visits to a notorious Australian Youth Detention Prison/Detention Centre in the course of her ministry. She was able to read only two pages before the nauseating memories of her time as a prison chaplain overwhelmed her.

I am wondering how we, in the wider church(es), train, resource and support people called to this ministry? Is there a nation-wide, cross-denominational group or training course that acknowledges and responds to this difficult but strategic task?

Tom's account is an example of how confronting this ministry is and the grace and resourcefulness of God who equipped him in ways he hardly recognised at the time, to 'do what had to be done'.

"I was in prison and you visited me" said Jesus (Matt 25:36).

How can we better encourage one another in this daunting ministry?

'A Cry Went Up in the Desert' is no longer available from MediaCom Education.

It may now be obtained from: Desert Publications – mhgunn@bigpond.net.au

Cost: \$25

From Janet Dawson

Dear Editor,

My name is Janet Dawson and I am a retired UCA minister living in Port Macquarie, NSW.

In December 2024, Coventry Press, Melbourne, published my book *Psalms from my Seventies and other stuff*. The first run having sold out, they have recently completed a second run of a somewhat optimistic amount, which leads me to think I need to do my best to help them sell it! NSW *Insights* magazine have put up a review [see QR Code link] but it seems to me that it would be a good idea to try to get word out in the other Synods as well.

Feedback I have received from readers indicates that the entries have been helpful to active Christians and fringe dwellers alike. My best feedback thus far has been from a friend's husband. I was surprised he even read it, but apparently he read it twice! For him at least my missional intent had been fulfilled!

Blessings and peace,
Janet.

Janet's psalms are vulnerable and empathetic, inviting tears and smiles amidst the uncertainty of an honest, open-hearted faith.

Rev Dr Jason John

Janet Dawson lives as she writes. In this book, she exemplifies a deep spirituality in the ordinariness of life ... There is no pretence, no puffed-up terminology, no pious hope in these prayers; they are every day, grounded in the ordinary – and thus, so profound.

Rev Dr John Squires

The grief associated with aging and dementia, the ephemeral nature of human happiness and the fragility and vulnerability of our natural world ... are all identified and lifted up in prayer by Janet to the God of understanding presence.

Rev Elizabeth Raine



Read the review
in *Insights* Magazine



Buy the book

Janet Dawson is a retired Minister of the Uniting Church in Australia. Born in England and educated in New Zealand, she travelled extensively before settling in Australia in 1983 with her husband George. They have two daughters and five grandchildren. Janet was ordained in 1991 and ministered in several congregations in NSW, serving in various other ministries within the NSW Synod and the General Assembly of the Uniting Church.

Her book, *Psalms from my Seventies* and other stuff is available from Coventry Press here: <https://tinyurl.com/2s4davr8> or via the QR Code above.



From Bill Loader

Dear colleagues,

I write to draw to your attention my recent book *Following John. A Commentary for People on the Road*, designed to be a helpful resource for preachers and congregations. May I ask that you mention it in your paper, please?

Best wishes,
Bill.

William Loader's commentary provides a vital resource for readers of John who want to understand it in a relevant and timely way, without being engulfed in technicalities ... this is a simple and accessible commentary ... written by an eminent Johannine scholar who knows his material so well that he can communicate it with clarity and lucidity.

Professor Dorothy Lee

Bill Loader takes us on a journey following John ... [with] helpful stops to converse with Matthew, Mark and Luke. Our guide has been exploring this road for 50 years; its promises and its puzzles. This is an invaluable resource for the preacher and pilgrim.

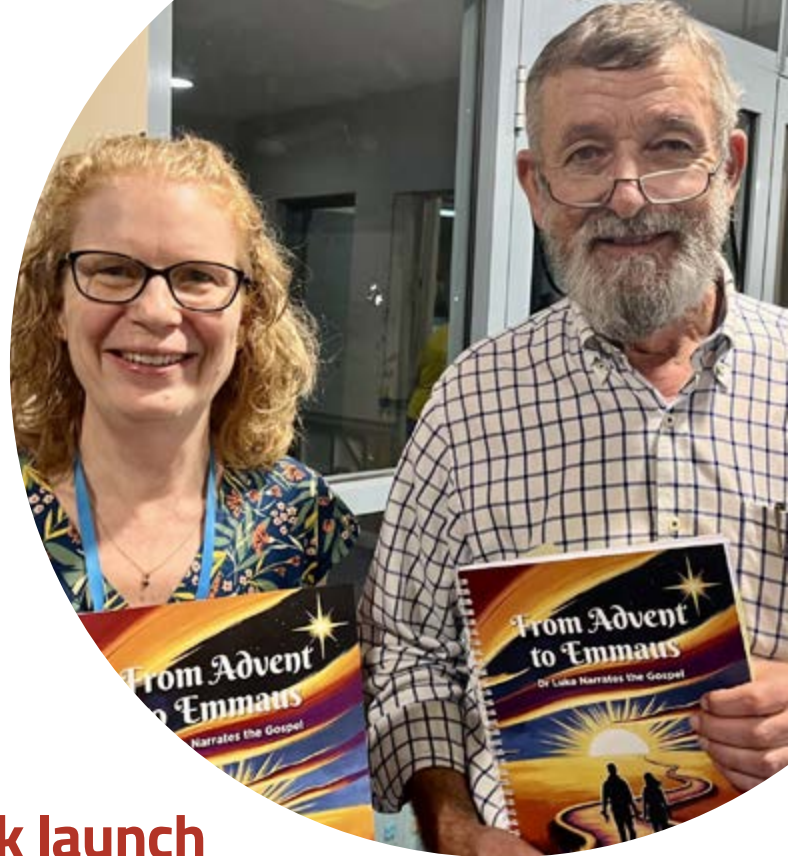
Rev Alan Robinson



Buy the book

Bill Loader (aka Emeritus Professor William Loader) is a retired Uniting Church Minister, former Professor at Murdoch University, and taught for many years in the Perth Theological Hall. He is a leading New Testament scholar and also a provider of resources for preachers and group study through his website, billloader.com.

Following John. A Commentary for People on the Road is available for purchase online at <https://tinyurl.com/bdzhc6e3> or via the QR Code above.



Book launch

From Advent to Emmaus – dramas from Luke's gospel

On Friday 28 February, *From Advent to Emmaus*, a book of 54 short dramas written by local SA author Jim Hayward and based on Luke's gospel, was officially launched.

The book has been published by the Centre for Music Liturgy and the Arts (CMLA) and was launched at the February meeting of the Presbytery of Southern South Australia. Jim Hayward is an experienced lay preacher, author of poetry and prose, and accountant who has worked in many diverse contexts across the state. As part of the launch event, Jim spoke about how the book was written.

Each script features Dr Luke narrating a Bible passage to his scribe Nathaneal while the two have conversations about the stories behind it. The conversations are insightful, thought-provoking and witty. The focus on the two characters provides a continuity of character and narrative across the series.

While primarily based on the gospel of Luke (featured in Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary), the 54 scripts include a Good Friday drama from Matthew's gospel and have been developed and tested locally in South Australia. They are suitable for church worship services or education programs, for everyone from youth to adults.

Copies can be ordered online, either print or digital from www.cmla.org.au.

Expressions of Interest – Disability Advisory Committee

At the Synod24 meeting, it was resolved to establish a Disability Advisory Committee in 2025 to:

- oversee the implementation across the Uniting Church in South Australia of the Disability Access and Inclusion Policy
- provide advice to the proposed Chaplain for People with Disabilities upon the advocacy that is going to be required in that role.

Expressions of Interest are now being sought from people across the Uniting Church who are interested in being part of the Disability Advisory Committee.

The following criteria will be applied in this Expression of Interest process where individuals may respond to one or more of the categories listed below:

- Lived Experience across different types of disability (at least 1/3 of the Disability Advisory Committee should have lived experience)
- Carer
- Involved in service delivery (e.g. NDIS support or other forms of supports to people with disabilities such as employment, housing etc)
- Skills in training / education that relate to the Disability Sector
- Expertise in policy development and implementation
- Experience in Disability Advocacy
- Understanding of the Disability Royal Commission and its key principles regarding rights, self-determination and hearing and responding to people's voices.
- Uniting Church member with an understanding of congregation, Presbyteries, etc.

Size: The Disability Advisory Committee will have up to 12 sitting members with additional resourcing members from Placements and Safe Church and UnitingCare SA.

Meeting Frequency: The Committee will meet at least 4 times per year.

Please lodge your Expression of Interest by **Monday, May 12 2025** including a cover letter describing your interest (and if available an up-to-date CV) with Mark Waters, Director, UnitingCare SA on mwaters@sa.uca.org.au or send it to the Synod Office via GPO Box 2145, Adelaide, SA, 5001.

If you wish to discuss this opportunity further, please contact Mark Waters on 0417 834 938 or 8236 4276.

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Placements News

Placements Finalised as at 16 April 2025

Rev Anne Butler to Morialta UC from 1 June 2025

Rev Lawrie Linggood as POSSA Presbytery Minister from 15 June 2025.

Advertised Placements: Please see Positions Vacant for more details: sa.uca.org.au/uc-positions-vacant

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Kangaroo Island Linked Congregations (0.8)

Lighthouse, Port Pirie UC

Naracoorte UC

The Vines UC (0.7)

Presbytery of Southern SA

Rosefield UC

Seacliff UC

Unley UC (0.3)

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PROFILES NOT YET AVAILABLE

Generate Presbytery

Port Augusta UC (0.5)

Waikerie UC (0.6)

Presbytery of Southern SA

Bridgewater UC (0.5)

Colonel Light Gardens UC from 15 June 2025

Newland-Port Elliot (0.6)

Noarlunga UC (0.8)

Seaford Ecumenical (0.4)

Yilki UC (0.3)

Wimala Presbytery

Clayton Wesley UC

Goyder Ministry Area (0.8)

For more information about placements, please visit sa.uca.org.au

Deadline for the *New Times* Autumn edition 2025

Friday, 18th July 2025

ISSN 0726-2612

New Times is the voice of Uniting Church in SA. Published quarterly and on a seasonal basis. *New Times* represents the breadth, diversity and vision of Uniting Church members in South Australia. Articles and advertising do not necessarily reflect the views of the *New Times* Editorial team.

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