



The Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of South Australia

# New Times

March 2026 • Issue 63



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## Cover details:

"Pure, Unbounded Love" – Artwork by Alex Gatley.

|                                   |                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Editor:</b> Clive Conway       | <b>Editorial and advertising enquiries:</b>                                   |
| <b>Sub-editor:</b> Megan Koch     | Phone: (08) 8236 4249                                                         |
| <b>Design:</b> Alex Gatley        | Email: <a href="mailto:engagement@sa.uca.org.au">engagement@sa.uca.org.au</a> |
| <b>Print:</b> Lane Communications | Mail: The Editor, New Times                                                   |
| <b>Print circulation:</b> 6,000   | GPO Box 2145                                                                  |
|                                   | Adelaide SA 5001                                                              |

## Deadline for next issue:

Sunday 3 May 2026

New Times is produced on the lands of the Kaurna people. We are deeply grateful for their stewardship of the land on which we live, work and play and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We celebrate the continuous cultural, spiritual, and physical connection that our First Nations peoples have to their land, waters and community, and we commit to truth-telling, seeking justice and healing.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of South Australia

Synod of South Australia  
Level 2, 212 Pirie St, Adelaide  
Phone: (08) 8236 4200  
Fax: (08) 8236 4201  
Country callers: 1300 766 956



[sa.uca.org.au](http://sa.uca.org.au)

# Letters to the Editor

Clive,

Thank you for the New Times of December 2025: it was superb because of several cutting edge articles ('What is Renewal', 'Sportswashing', 'Julia's Dream', 'Mission as God's Wounded Love').

As a retired minister I look for material rich in its understanding which is refreshing, creative, offering new perspectives/visions, with some spiritual/theological reflections and which points the way forward for our church. This the December issue had in abundance. I look forward in hope to further exciting issues like this.

I confess to a slight bias – my congregation has been supporting Oodnadatta over a number of years. That report was special.

Shalom,

**Rev Bill Service**

Minister in Association, Henley-Fulham congregation

Thank you, Clive, for your article in the December edition of *New Times* on Sportswashing. I thought I was up to date and understood the influence of sponsorship on sporting events in Adelaide. However, your analysis has raised further concerns and has encouraged me to keep track of what is happening.

Along with other city organisations including the Anti-Poverty Network and Adelaide Day Centre for Homeless Persons, Pilgrim Uniting Church is hosting a candidates' forum for the State seat of Adelaide. At the forum candidates will be invited to respond to people effected by the housing crisis. I think now we should also raise questions at the forum about recent trends and sponsorship.

**Rev Dr Dean Eland**

President, UCA History Centre

**Send your letters to:**

[engagement@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:engagement@sa.uca.org.au)  
or GPO Box 2145,  
Adelaide 5001

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## From the Moderator

# PURE, UNBOUNDED LOVE

As we were developing this year's Uniting Church SA calendar, I was struck by the profound imagery within Alex Gatley's cover design. My eye was initially drawn to the Christ Child in the manger and then to the path to a distant tree cradling a heart – beginning with Jesus Immanuel, God with us, before leading to the symbol of the cross, and the heart expressing God's love for the world. It is also interesting that the heart appears to blend into the distance which draws us further out, into God's creation, the world.

One of my favourite hymns is *Love divine, all loves excelling*. I recall two phrases from the first verse in particular – “joy of heaven to earth come down” and “pure unbounded love thou art”. The heart of this hymn exudes the joy and love of God with language that invites us to further reflection – what exactly is ‘unbounded love’?

Baptist theologian James McLendon Jr would argue that unbounded love is faithful, self-giving, and non-coercive, and that it creates space for genuine response. Unbounded love is revealed in the life and witness of Jesus the crucified Christ. It does not imply that love ignores limits, justice, or human freedom.

Unbounded love is relational rather than abstract. It is enacted in concrete practices of healing, forgiveness, and table fellowship. It is experienced within the community shaped by Jesus' story and it extends to the outcast, the rejected, the broken, those in places of power and those without power.

Unbounded love gathers and heals. It is a love that seeks us out, pursuing us no matter who we are or where we may be. It is a love that challenges our need to strive and to control the narrative. It reminds us that “we love because God first loved us” (1 John 4:19). It calls us all to a place of vulnerability with God and with each other, and it calls us to justice and reconciliation.



Listen to  
the hymn

May we know the joy and the challenge of God's faithful, cruciform, unbounded love, and may we offer our praise with the psalmist:

*Your unfailing love is better than life itself;  
how I praise you!  
I will praise you as long as I live,  
lifting up my hands to you in prayer.  
You satisfy me more than the richest feast.  
I will praise you with songs of joy.*

Psalm 63:3–5 (NLT)

*Peter*

**Rev Peter Morel**  
Moderator



# From the Editor

# My Song is Love Unknown



Listen to  
the hymn

There is something about music that can open us up to God in powerful and unexpected ways, often more deeply than just words, or doctrine, or a well-constructed theological argument. Music, and not just sacred music, can create a synergistic union of sound and story that sits at the intersection of experience and mystery, hope and despair, memory and aspiration, reality and imagination, and so become a pathway to the sacred.

Words alone can *inform* us, but music can *transform* us. When we sing, the ideas we proclaim can settle not only into our minds but also into our breath, our posture, our shared space with one another, and our connection with other like-minded people throughout history. A melody can soften our certainties and make us open and vulnerable; it can carry both grief and hope. A repeated refrain can hold more prayer than a thousand carefully worded sentences.

The Moderator's message in this edition of New Times started me thinking about one of my favourite hymns, also about God's love, and very topical in this Easter season.

*My Song Is Love Unknown*, that extraordinary fusion of Samuel Crossman's words and John Ireland's music, is a profound example of how music offers us a way of experiencing the passion of Jesus rather than merely *thinking* about it. It's the one piece of music I know that makes tears well in me every single time I sing it, as I feel my past, present and future collide with the suffering Jesus on the cross, at once at his most human, but also, through the sheer selflessness of that love, his most fully divine.

*My song is love unknown –  
my Saviour's love to me,  
love to the loveless shown  
that they might lovely be.*

At the heart of the hymn is an intense expression of awe and wonder, that God's love is not abstract or distant but embodied in vulnerability. It brings us face-to-face with a love revealed in solidarity, sacrifice, and shared suffering. Christ not seen as a divine hero wielding power from on high, but as love incarnate – steadfast and utterly immersed in the world.

John Ireland's plaintive, yearning tune combines with these magnificent words to draw us in to *experiencing* this love. The music becomes a vessel that holds these truths and allows them to resonate, vibrate, and settle within us. We do not merely learn that God's love is different – we *feel* the difference.

At Easter, it's easy to focus entirely on the joy of the resurrection. Interestingly, Samuel Crossman's poem doesn't talk about the resurrection at all, only the overwhelmingly singular love, selflessness and compassion demonstrated by Jesus in his short ministry and in his path towards Calvary – that "pure, unbounded love" referred to by the Moderator. Paradoxically, this love is 'unknown' in that it is at the very limits of our comprehension, and continues to overwhelm our expectations, and yet it is not 'unknowable', for:

*This is my friend, in whose sweet Praise  
I all my days could gladly spend.*

Clive

Clive Conway  
Editor



# From the General Secretary

# Growing as

# followers of

# Jesus

We have conducted two surveys with congregations on matters relating to mission, vitality and property. One of the questions we have repeated refers to whether congregations have a plan to help people move from “no espoused faith in God to being mature followers of Jesus”. The responses to this question have been disappointing, with few congregations reporting any plans.

I will admit that some might find the question difficult to understand; that is what happens when you are trying to avoid offending people across a range of understandings of evangelism and discipleship. Secondly, I do believe that most congregations do have some ideas about this, they just haven't put time aside to develop those ideas. The very fact that we worship on Sundays, provide space and hospitality for gathering after worship, and encourage people to reflect on Scripture both individually and in group settings, suggests that many of us are doing at least some things to help people grow as followers of Jesus.

Could we be more intentional in how we do these things? Might we be better at communicating how worship and prayer help us grow as followers? Well, probably. Might we consider what other things we are able to do to help people deepen their faith in any given year or two years? At a recent service our minister informed us that our focus for the year would be on discipleship. In his sermon he said, “Discipleship is being formed by Jesus. For many of us it is often accidental, haphazard and in a patchwork sort of way. The invitation of the coming year is for discipleship to be more deliberate, discerning and focused” (Rev David Hoffman, from sermon notes). I sat up when I heard that! It fits so well with the upcoming Synod Strategic Plan.

In Ephesians, Paul writes about how the Spirit gives ministry gifts to the church to “equip the saints, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of faith and of knowledge of the Song of God, to maturity, to the measure of

the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12–16). There are a lot of words in that sentence. All of them are expressing in various ways the goal of followers of Jesus becoming mature in Christ.

I think that maturity is a helpful way of thinking about the Christian life. It suggests that growth doesn't happen instantaneously. It hints at the importance of the passing of time, the deepening of roots. On the one hand there are natural processes at work when things mature, yet there is also the awareness that the passing of time does not equal maturity – maturity often occurs best when there is both intention and patience. We cannot force maturity but maybe we can produce the conditions in which maturity can prosper.

Most of our congregations are doing good work in helping people grow as followers of Jesus. But as David Hoffman suggests it can be “accidental, haphazard and a patchwork”. I think we would be well served as communities of faith if we could turn the dial a little and become more thoughtful, discerning and intentional in creating environments in which people grow as followers of Jesus. As it says in the *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit Report*, “Ongoing and intentional conversation will help us have a better understanding of what it means to cultivate life-giving communities of discipleship and mission”.<sup>1</sup> If your congregation or Church Council would like a conversation partner, you might like to contact the Mission Resourcing Team or your presbytery.



**Rev Philip Gardner**  
General Secretary



<sup>1</sup> Act2: The Gift of the Spirit, February 2024 p. 41.  
<https://act2uca.com/report/gift-of-the-spirit/>

# A faith response to climate change

By members of the SA Synod's Environmental Action Group

At the SA Synod meeting in July 2022 members decided that, as a Church, we would aim to achieve net zero emissions from our activities by 2040.

Net zero means that we aim to eliminate as many emissions of greenhouse gases from our activities as possible, and that we offset any remaining emissions by investing in projects which reduce atmospheric carbon elsewhere.

Following Synod's decision, the Environmental Action Group (EAG) was asked by the Synod Standing Committee to act as the core of the Synod Climate Action Working Party. EAG then worked with five volunteer churches to develop a road map for achieving this goal. A number of UCA churches have already committed to reaching net zero over the coming years.

The UCA's commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation – a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God.

We believe that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings. The foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, the *Basis of Union*, expressed this as the very heart of the Church's mission: "God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end".

In his recent Polkinghorne Oration, Rev Tim Costello underlined how climate change is also a social justice issue for Christians. Many of the people most affected are in Asia and Africa and are generally among the poorest in the world. Key motivations for action include a sense of responsibility for the planet and its inhabitants, a desire to protect the vulnerable, and a view of environmental care as an expression of faith.

At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest



group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both 'the human environment' and the natural environment. (*Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good, US Catholic Bishops, 2001*).

In a recent speech during the opening session of a conference celebrating the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si', on care for our common home*, Pope Leo XIV challenged all people of faith – not just Christians. "People of faith cannot love God while despising his creatures, and people cannot call themselves Christians without caring for everything fragile and wounded, including the earth ... There is no room for indifference or resignation ... God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that he created, for the benefit of all and for future generations, and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters. What will be our answer?"

"Some have chosen to deride the increasingly evident signs of climate change, to ridicule those who speak of global warming and even to blame the poor for the very thing that affects them the most."

Pope Leo also called everyone in society to put pressure on governments to develop and implement more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. "Citizens need to take an active role in political decision-making at national, regional and local levels," he said. "Only then will it be possible to mitigate the damage done to the environment"

The challenges identified in *Laudato si'* are even more relevant today than they were 10 years ago, and these challenges, which are social, political and spiritual, "call for conversion".

"It is only by returning to the heart that a true ecological conversion can take place. We must shift from collecting data



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to caring; and from environmental discourse to an ecological conversion that transforms both personal and communal lifestyles.”

“Nor can we call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ without participating in his outlook on creation and his care for all that is fragile and wounded.”

Integral ecology thrives on four relationships: with God, with others, with nature and with ourselves, he said. “Through our commitment to them, we can grow in hope by living out the interdisciplinary approach of *Laudato si'* and the call to unity and collaboration that flows from it”.

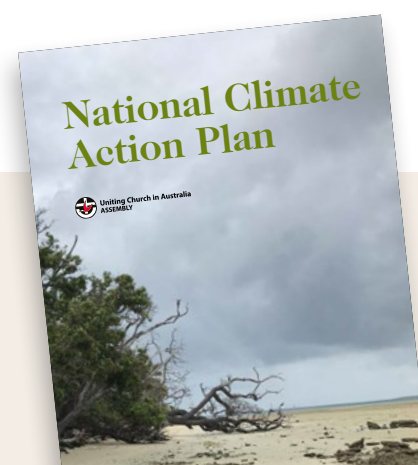
He concluded by saying, “I encourage everyone, especially young people, parents and those who work in local and national administrations and institutions, to play their part in finding solutions for today’s cultural, spiritual and educational challenges, always striving tenaciously for the common good”.

For us in the Uniting Church, Pope Leo’s words show that we have common cause with people of faith from many religions who recognise our responsibility to care for this beautiful and precious earth – our home. As our world continues to deteriorate from exploitation of resources and excessive emissions we must commit to changing the way we live to tread more lightly on the earth.

The Net Zero project is just one way we can express this concern and participate in the changes we all have to make to save our world.

***Laudato si'* is one of three ecumenical documents recognised by the 17th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia as ‘Continuing Witness’ documents, in accordance with Paragraph 11 of the *Basis of Union*. The other documents were the *Belhar Confession*, and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.**

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**Read Pope Leo’s full speech**

<https://catholicweekly.com.au/world-must-come-together-to-fight-climate-change-pope-leo-says/>



**Uniting Church Resources available**

<https://victas.uca.org.au/resources/climate-change/>



**SA Synod Action Plan**

[https://www.environmentalaction.org.au/\\_files/d/078ad7\\_98ca157ecf07457f9480532254047de9.pdf](https://www.environmentalaction.org.au/_files/d/078ad7_98ca157ecf07457f9480532254047de9.pdf)

# When the heart has been enlarged

From the Graduation Address to the University of Divinity  
Immanuel College Chapel, 12 February 2026

By Rev Dr Sean Gilbert



It's a joy to participate in a such a significant rite of passage as this, honouring the achievements of these finely gowned and capped people! And so may this be a time of great celebration, whilst recognising that glad completions may well symbolise radically new beginnings!

When considering what I would say this evening, I recalled how moving last year's Graduation at St Peter's Cathedral was for me. The reason being, I'd taught just about every Uniting College graduand present, yet more to the point, I knew them not merely as 'my' students, but as fellow travellers who had also been changed by theological education. Positively and irreversibly so.

So, the question I'd like to pursue briefly this evening is, why is such a depth of change often the case, and how might these *impactful* experiences of theological reflection contribute to a more peaceful, unified world?

Well, for one, theological education at its best does not regard God as the object of our possessive scrutiny. On the contrary, the beautiful and *beautifying* mystery of God remains the subject of both our fidelity and wonderment. And while that *is* a scholarly pursuit on one level, it concerns itself, ultimately, with a desire to be encountered – and further formed – by the gifting of divine love. St Irenaeus of Lyon said it clearly, if not bluntly:

*"It is better and more profitable that we should be uneducated and know little, so as be drawn nearer to the love of God, than we should think ourselves deeply learned and experienced..."*

Indeed, it has long impressed me that another Saint, St Benedict of Nursia, likened Christian formation to enrolling in a school for service to God, in which the self-emptying love of God is to be learned over time and rehearsed in community, thus *safeguarded* for the wellbeing of the whole.

I don't see much difference between Benedict's monastic ideal and the hope of contemporary theological education undertaken

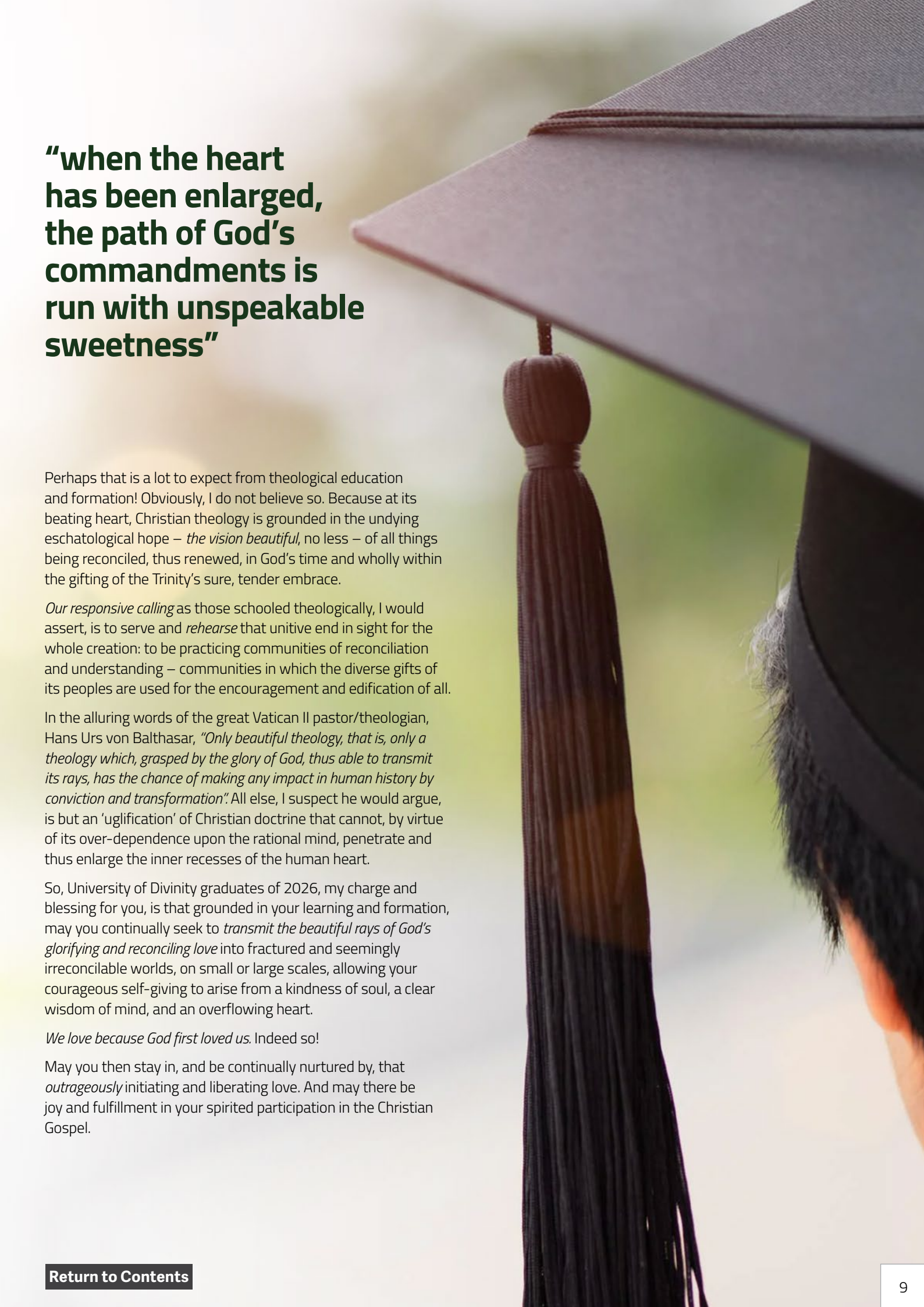
within the *riven* environments in which we presently live. That being, an explorative journey into greater capacities for love and wisdom within a heartbreakingly *combustible* world. I believe Benedict's poetic words are applicable to us all:

*"[for]... when the heart has been enlarged, the path of God's commandments is run with unspeakable sweetness..."*

Ah, "*when the heart has been enlarged!*" That is what I knew to be true to our graduands last February and no doubt is in evidence here tonight: an increased capacity for service to God and the world certainly, but one that arises out of deepened appreciations of selfhood and a corresponding calling to vocation (ministry). A *soulful* shift, if you like, into the good graces of acceptance, wisdom, imagination and spirited mercy. A tangible movement beyond the binary worlds – binding worlds, in fact – of common religious practices, wherein our one precious world is unnecessarily divided into 'us and them,' or into lightness and dark, flesh and spirit.

One of things I have always sought to impress upon theology and ministry students is that at its core, the Christian faith lives and breathes within with the harmonising beauty of paradox; that is, the art of holding seemingly irreconcilable differences, such as 'truly God, truly human,' or 'one in three, three in one,' in creative tension, generating as it were, in the words of T.S. Eliot, "a third point of departure". Imaginative, intuitive steps in a *unitive* direction.

Friends, I'd put to you that we, in both the church and wider society, are presently in desperate need of *third points of unitive departure*; conscious movements beyond tribal forms of identity that condescend towards another's; respectful behaviours transcending long held cultural practices that have assumed a superiority of knowledge, most often western, male and white in expressive form. And open postures of faith that enable us to see fully the lived experience of those who display a spiritual way of life beyond Christian frameworks of belief.



## **“when the heart has been enlarged, the path of God’s commandments is run with unspeakable sweetness”**

Perhaps that is a lot to expect from theological education and formation! Obviously, I do not believe so. Because at its beating heart, Christian theology is grounded in the undying eschatological hope – *the vision beautiful*, no less – of all things being reconciled, thus renewed, in God’s time and wholly within the gifting of the Trinity’s sure, tender embrace.

*Our responsive calling* as those schooled theologically, I would assert, is to serve and *rehearse* that unitive end in sight for the whole creation: to be practicing communities of reconciliation and understanding – communities in which the diverse gifts of its peoples are used for the encouragement and edification of all.

In the alluring words of the great Vatican II pastor/theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *“Only beautiful theology, that is, only a theology which, grasped by the glory of God, thus able to transmit its rays, has the chance of making any impact in human history by conviction and transformation”*. All else, I suspect he would argue, is but an ‘uglification’ of Christian doctrine that cannot, by virtue of its over-dependence upon the rational mind, penetrate and thus enlarge the inner recesses of the human heart.

So, University of Divinity graduates of 2026, my charge and blessing for you, is that grounded in your learning and formation, may you continually seek to *transmit the beautiful rays of God’s glorifying and reconciling love* into fractured and seemingly irreconcilable worlds, on small or large scales, allowing your courageous self-giving to arise from a kindness of soul, a clear wisdom of mind, and an overflowing heart.

*We love because God first loved us*. Indeed so!

May you then stay in, and be continually nurtured by, that *outrageously* initiating and liberating love. And may there be joy and fulfillment in your spirited participation in the Christian Gospel.



# Chaplains as 'spiritual care' practitioners

*By Rev Steve Blackett  
Coordinating Chaplain, Resthaven Marion,  
Aberfoyle Park and Bellevue Heights*

Spiritual care supports a person's inner wellbeing and addresses universal human needs such as meaning, belonging, connection and hope. Indicators of strong spiritual health include being at peace with ourselves, having loving connections with others, experiences of the universe that inspire awe and wonder, and a belief system that generates hope. A person with strong spiritual health will generally be peaceful, loving and joyful.

You might like to read through that list again and reflect on your own spiritual wellbeing.

Chaplains are spiritual care practitioners. In aged care contexts, spiritual wellbeing is critical not only to living to our full potential, but also to facing death with acceptance and peace. I think of our role as Chaplains as supporting people to have a good life, and a good death.

Death and dying are topics we often avoid in our materialistic and success-driven culture. And yet in aged care facilities they come up in conversation as easily as discussing the weather or what we had for lunch. For many people there is a sense of relief in preparing for their death – although everyone will have their unique way of processing this important work.

As Chaplains, we are available to discuss this important topic of death and dying with residents and their loved ones, and to support them in planning and preparation.

Another aspect of our work is supporting residents with their important religious beliefs and practices. Support and encouragement are given to residents to maintain their connections with their chosen religious denomination.

I am thankful that Resthaven recognises the importance of spiritual wellbeing and employs Chaplains as spiritual care practitioners.

Resthaven's Coordinating Chaplains support residents, their family and their friends to meet pastoral care needs. They collaborate closely with others in the residential service team, providing individually tailored emotional, religious and spiritual support to residents of all faiths or none.

# 75 years of community, faith and basketball celebrated in 2025

By Tristan Prentice

Last year, the SA Church Basketball Association celebrated 75 rewarding years of local sport. They marked the occasion with an afternoon function at the State Basketball Centre in Wayville.

It was a chance to celebrate the contributions of the association and its constituent groups to the basketball community. A number of special guests attended, including Basketball SA CEO Tim Brenton and Chair James Kitching, Australian Boomers alumni John Heard and Mark Lampshire, and several Life Members.

The afternoon was hosted by Media Coordinator Tristan Prentice (the creator of the 70th anniversary documentary *SACBA: The Journey*). A reading from an article by the late Dr Ron Kimber about the beginnings of the organisation sparked treasured memories, before dual Olympian and Life Member John Heard shared his reflections on the association's early years and its future.

Attendees enjoyed watching video clips of the United Church District Basketball Club (now the Sturt Sabres) and the forming of the current SA Church Stars District Club. Longtime club stalwart and court official Susan Burns shared more stories from the organisation's history, and Association Vice President Neil Sheehan spoke to the future of church basketball.

The presentation concluded with an acknowledgement that important steps have been taken to put the association

and its district club in a strong position for future growth. There has been a particular focus on growing girls' and women's participation, and on working towards representation at higher levels in South Australian basketball, including the NBL1 competition.

After some final thanks and acknowledgements, Peter Battersby of the Unley Park Baptist Church Club performed the cutting of a beautifully made anniversary cake. This was followed by afternoon tea and an invitation to watch two of the oldest clubs – Corner Uniting (formerly Wesley-Warradale) and Brighton Church of Christ – play their Men's Division 1 game.

New participants are always welcome, with all-abilities competitions available at multiple venues across metropolitan Adelaide on Saturday afternoons and Tuesday nights. There is also the option to play or coach for SA Church Basketball's district club, the Stars, which operates with family-friendly values, including no training on Sundays.

Introductory basketball programs and camps are also offered, as well as a highly-regarded court referee training program (for both young and mature-aged trainees).

The SA Church Basketball Association also invites players to prepare for the New Year Classic: a week-long faith-based tournament in Victoria from 2 January 2027. Come along and join a



Top: Dual Olympian John Heard sharing his reflections.

Bottom: Life Member Peter Battersby cutting the cake.

church, school or community club, and participate in a longstanding organisation that values community, faith and basketball.

Beyond the sport itself, SA Church Basketball is above all about encouraging the spirit of community and teamwork. For more information and to get involved, visit [www.sachurchbasketball.com.au](http://www.sachurchbasketball.com.au).

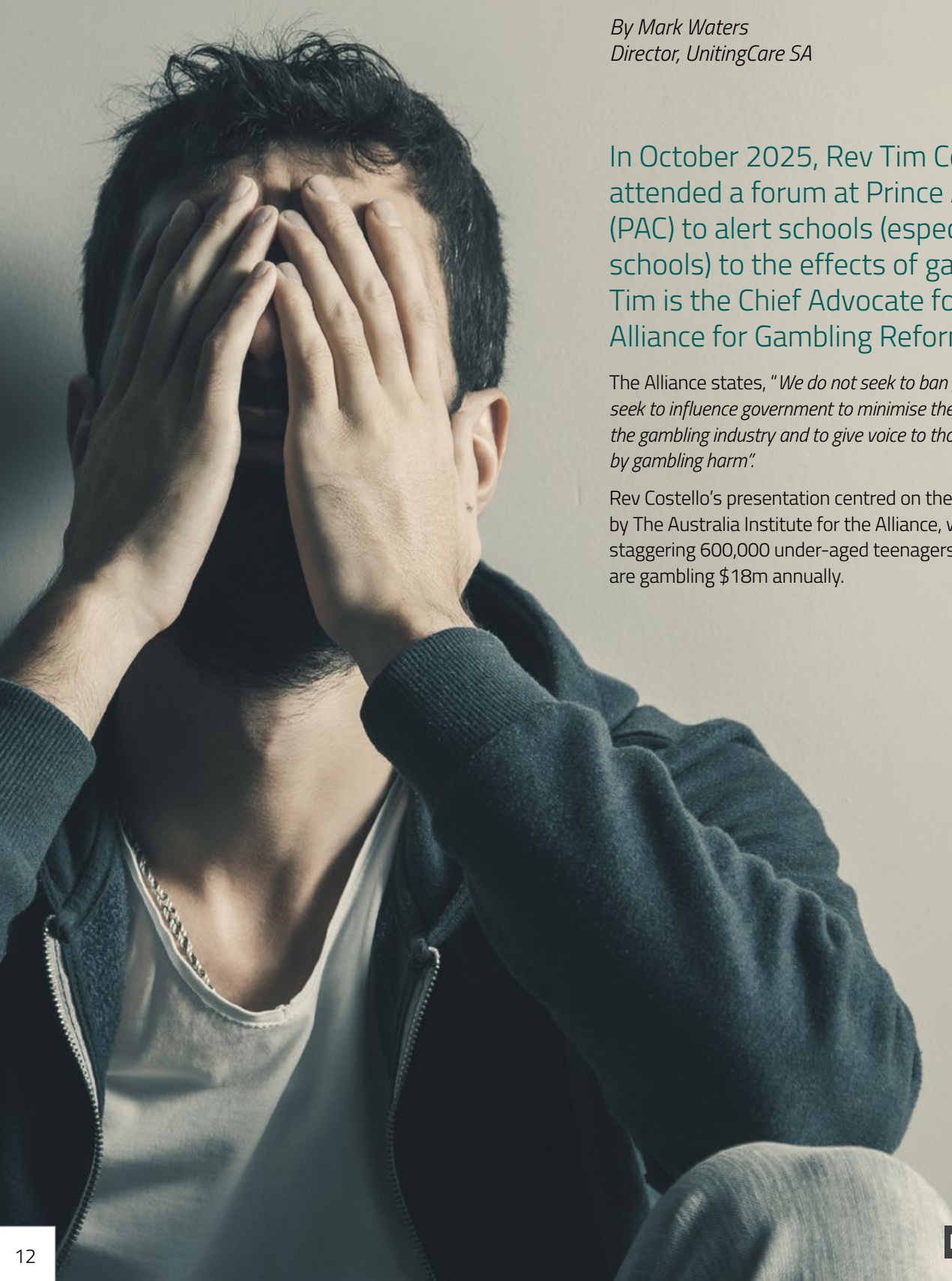
# Gambling reform

By Mark Waters  
Director, UnitingCare SA

In October 2025, Rev Tim Costello attended a forum at Prince Alfred College (PAC) to alert schools (especially boys' schools) to the effects of gambling harm. Tim is the Chief Advocate for the national Alliance for Gambling Reform.

The Alliance states, "*We do not seek to ban gambling. Rather we seek to influence government to minimise the harmful behaviours of the gambling industry and to give voice to those who are impacted by gambling harm*".

Rev Costello's presentation centred on the research conducted by The Australia Institute for the Alliance, which revealed that a staggering 600,000 under-aged teenagers (12–17 years of age) are gambling \$18m annually.





**Read the  
Murphy Report**



**Read the Alliance  
for Gambling  
Reform's Annual  
Report 2025**

Disturbingly, Tim regularly deals with the consequences of young people being affected by gambling harm as described in his Chief Advocates' report in the Alliance's Annual Report 2025:

*"... the Victorian Coroner heard details of the tragic suicide of a 22-year-old young man, Kyle Hudson. Kyle took his life shortly after losing two bets worth more than \$6,000.*

*The hearing is set to probe the actions of SportsBet and the banks from which Kyle drew out large sums of money for betting.*

*The tragic case provides a troubling snapshot behind the figures that show sports betting is exploding among young men – growing at up to 40% annually."*

Rev Costello went on to describe another interaction with a group of leaders aged 18–20 at a University in Melbourne.

*"After the event, a young man dressed in a suit told me that he had been at an ex-school friend's funeral that day. His friend took his life after losing all his savings in sports betting.*

*They had started gambling at school and he said all his friends, all underage, were gambling.*

*For boys not to be gambling and talking about their wins at school was so uncool – such is the capture of gambling and sport."*

Federal Sports and Communications Minister, Anika Wells, when adding YouTube to the social media ban for under 16-year-olds, said she was intent on protecting people not platforms.

She is the Minister now in charge of responding to the 31 recommendations made by the *Inquiry into online gambling and its impacts* chaired by Peta Murphy, including recommendations to ban gambling ads and gambling incentives. But two years on from Murphy's recommendations we still have no government response to the recommendations nor any reform to protect children being groomed by gambling ads.

Polling in response to the Murphy report has found that *"Four in five Australians agree that children are exposed to too many gambling ads (80%), and 76% support a full ban on gambling ads"*.

In a cost-of-living crisis where every dollar needs to be counted, incentivising individuals' losses to the gambling industry needs to be regulated and curtailed. The Uniting Church in Australia (and in South Australia) has provided leadership and advocacy around gambling and gambling advertising before. This issue once again prompts us to look at the question, "How do we as Christians and as a church respond?"



**On average Australian households spent \$3,045 on gambling in 2022–23, more than they spent on essential utilities like electricity, gas, and other fuels (\$2,821)**



**There has been a 25% spike in gambling losses compared to pre-pandemic losses**



**Gambling losses have risen 6.8% while real wages have declined 5.7%**



**Australia's annual gambling losses (\$31.5b) now eclipse what governments spend on aged care (\$28.3b) and rivals that spent on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (\$35.2b)**

Chrissie was only seven when she first noticed things disappearing from their home. Jewellery, appliances, furniture – her mother was selling everything to feed a gambling addiction that would steal Chrissie's childhood.

"I came home one day when I was 14 years old to find I didn't have a home anymore," Chrissie recalls. The family faced days without adequate food, devastating poverty, and constant instability as her mother's pokies addiction consumed their lives.

The impact went far beyond financial hardship. "It created devastating amounts of poverty and mental health issues for us," Chrissie explains. "We certainly experienced material deprivation, but it also caused serious family breakdowns."

– From the Alliance for Gambling Reform's Annual Report 2025, p42



# Seeking resonance in a secular age

By Rev Dr Tim Hein

Every now and then a landmark book is written: the kind of book that other books are written about.

It's been nearly 20 years since the release of just such a book – *A Secular Age*, by Canadian Christian philosopher Charles Taylor. It was instantly recognised as a highly astute explanation of how, over the past 500 years, we changed from being “a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which belief, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others”.

It's a monster book, in both size and insight. If you want to get your head around his key ideas but don't want to wade through 850 pages, there is a host of secondary literature, including books, articles, podcasts and YouTube clips.

One of the best engagers of Charles Taylor's work is American theologian Andrew Root, Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has written a series of books inspired by Charles Taylor, about how various streams of the church have responded to the secular world.

One example is the phenomenon of social acceleration – the speed of modern life, with constant activity, information, and decision-making making us feel a constant pressure to keep up. Life must be constantly managed or optimised. It feels like a burden. And time is not received as a gift but feels like a threat. Parents feel it, and congregations can feel it too, feeling pressure to justify their existence.

Root explains that our secular instinct is to respond with control. We feel a constant impulse to do more, plan harder, move faster and manage outcomes – if we're just more efficient, more innovative, more relevant, we'll be more effective. We also place an increasing focus on managing resources – personally and corporately.

Root explains how this speed has a dulling effect on us, muting our sense of the transcendent. Things become manageable, but less meaningful. This secularism is experienced less as disbelief, and more as a silence, and so we feel more alienated. We feel less alive, focused on controlling the immanent word around us.

“Be still and know  
that I am God”

Psalms 46:10

A remedy for this can be found through seeking to live a life of *resonance*. This notion of resonance is a powerful one, and Root draws on the work of German sociologist and political scientist Hartmut Rosa, who describes resonance as being an uncontrollable experience of being *addressed*, responding through surrender (not control) in a manner that transforms us. You will have felt hints of this experience in a certain piece of music, falling snow, vulnerable conversation, or profound art. Children, of course, brim with it.

Theologically, we know this as general revelation of the presence of God – a fingerprint of the promise of grace. Using the beautiful song of Christ's self-emptying in Philippians 2, Root invites us to regularly relinquish control of our life and our future, taking our everyday anxious moments as 'little deaths' into the death of Christ. In these moments of surrender we can be touched by the Spirit of God, ministering through his presence. This opens us to a reoriented trust in God's divine action towards us, both in Christ and today, even this very moment.

“Be still and know that I am God,” the psalmist says. A prophetic word in a secular world.

A list of Andrew Root's many books, both academic and popular, can be found at [www.andrewroot.org](http://www.andrewroot.org). My recommended place to start is *A Pilgrimage Into Letting Go: Helping Parents and Pastors Embrace the Uncontrollable* (2025).



# Angels project

## Woodville Uniting Church

By Rev Ann Phillips

Knitters from Woodville Uniting Church have been busy knitting a host of angels which were sent out to bless the community just before Christmas. The project has been running at Woodville for three years with the number and variation of angels steadily growing. The group knitted over 350 angels in 2025 – an amazing achievement!

I first heard of the idea of knitted angels through Rev Linda Driver who has done a similar program at Athelstone and Brougham Place Uniting Churches, but the idea seems to have originated in the UK. Woodville UC has modified the idea to suit our context and ministry, and the angels have also diversified, with many colours and styles being knitted – after all, angels come in all shades, sizes and types!

Woodville UC is next door to the busy Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and the church has growing links with the Chaplains there (also providing a cake ministry to bless the staff). We also have a busy Op Shop which serves many hospital patients and staff.

So in 2025, two hundred of the knitted angels 'winged' their way next door to bless those in the hospital. The angels were left with the chaplains to give them out to patients over Christmas and the coming year. There is a beautiful story of an angel being given to a patient who was passing away to provide comfort. Angels were also given to family and friends as a form of comfort and remembrance.

One hundred angels flew further afield and went to bless patients at Flinders Medical Centre. Each angel has a tag so the receiver knows that it was knitted with love and care.

The final fifty or so were given away to customers of our Op Shop or taken by members of the church to give to those who would appreciate them.

This ministry is a simple one, yet is very effective. Woodville has become known by some of the staff at the QEH as the 'angel church' which is rather lovely!

*"While completing each Angel, I concentrate on making it attractive to its future owner, in the hope that it will be a blessing" – Judith*

*"... the love, warmth and sadness I felt hearing a child passed away with an angel for comfort and safety on his journey to Heaven" – Jenny*

*"It was the story in the Bulletin about a little boy that was dying that touched my heart and got me started making angels. It is such an easy thing to do and takes up little time as they are made while watching TV. It is a lovely ministry, which has such great potential" – Meredith*

I received this sad but poignant email from a lay chaplain at Women's and Children's Hospital via Rev Mandy Harvey – Chaplain at QEH (names have been changed for privacy):

*During my visits with Ben and his family at WCH I gave him an angel ... handknitted by the folk at the Woodville Uniting Church. I also gave Ben's four close school friends an angel when they were visiting him.*

*[Ben's mother] told me that he was cremated with a handknitted angel. During his last days he held the angel on his chest alongside a wooden hand cross.*

*Ben's parents were also given angels, and they are keeping them for comfort too.*

*I was wondering whether we could let the Woodville Uniting Church know about this as an affirmation of their angel ministry.*

If you'd like to know more about the project please contact Ann via email at [minister1@wuca.org.au](mailto:minister1@wuca.org.au)

# Together for Peace: United Nations 5th Global Peace Summit

*By Rosemary Dewerse and Emelia Haskey*

From 21–23 January, UCLT student and ministry candidate Emelia Haskey and Academic Dean Dr Rosemary Dewerse attended the United Nations 5th Global Peace Summit in Bangkok. 450 young people from 60 nations (accompanied by a few mentors) gathered to hear from people long-experienced in the hard work of peace-building in some of the world's most violent and fraught contexts, and to prepare for a year as Peace Ambassadors – acting locally, networking internationally.

## What did we hear?

The opening challenge of a child. "I believe that adults have the power to change the world, and we children are the reason they must ... When you choose peace you save a child's life; when you choose kindness you save a child's dreams." – Ava (12 years old).

The lament of a Palestinian-American activist, caught between the complex truths of history and the actions of her adopted home in her ancestral lands. From a life invested in advocating for systemic peace-building between nations, she is committed now to peace-building one relationship at a time. "When you can't affect the macro, go micro." – Manal Omar.

The passion of a poet, her confronting verse forged in her personal experience of the ongoing genocide in Darfur and the struggle and resilience of women in a patriarchal culture at war. "When you build nations on someone's bones, what sense does it make to break them?" – Emi Mahmoud.

The quiet but steely resolve of a former Ugandan child soldier and political prisoner turned criminal prosecutor of those who mass murder their own people. He advocated for laser-sharp focus on goodness. "We are all capable of doing the most monstrous things; we are all capable of doing the most glorious things." – Alfred Orono Orono.

The agonised reality of one whose childhood, innocence and voice was robbed from him during war in the former Yugoslavia.



**"We all have one roof,  
and that is the sky.  
What happens in one  
place under that roof  
affects us all."**

– Alfred Orono Orono

Chief of Child Protection with the UN Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan

He was betrayed by those he trusted; the torture he suffered silenced him for years. "Once you divide, once you turn on each other, it's really hard to forgive." – Mirsad Solakovic.

The courageous integrity of a Bosnian child born out of war. She is turning her story, with others, into redemptive hope and dignity for those conceived in violence. "Courage, resilience, perseverance, love, pain, sadness and joy are all the things we need to drive change." – Lejla Damon.

The sacrificial conviction of a young German (23 years old) bringing humanitarian aid on the frontline of the war in Ukraine. Inked under his heart: "Freedom isn't free." – Ruben Mawick.

The speech-duet of an Israeli soldier and Palestinian protestor. Together they are now non-violent combatants for peace. "The most difficult thing in life, really, is to put yourself in the shoes of another" – Chen Alon. "None of us has figured out the full truth. We are all trying our best." – Sulaiman Katif.

## Emelia's reflection

*Emelia has been commissioned as a Peace Ambassador for 2026 as a result of attending the Peace Summit. She is available to speak with you about this if you are interested in supporting her in this work and/or hearing more.*

*This reflection was first shared with the UCA Assembly.*

To attend the 5th Global Peace Summit at the United Nations in Bangkok seemed like a good opportunity to learn from survivors of conflict around the world and a place to make new friends. I knew I'd find it insightful, challenging, and something I could proudly put on my resumé. What I didn't realise was how it would change my life.

What was so moving to me was not just the stories of survival I heard, but the honesty of the speakers, boldly criticising the failures of humanitarian organisations, and speaking of what it means to work for peace when international law has finally been exposed as a façade for the powerful. Dr Omar spoke out against creating more NGOs in the image of the West and boiled our peacebuilding work down to simple awareness raising, stating, "The UN, the World Bank, NATO – no one is in control, and change from within organisations does not work ... we must look to our own circle of influence and go micro [with our justice work]". Reuben Mawick emphasised the same message in his powerful speech about the devastation he has witnessed in Ukraine, reminding us that "freedom is not free, and peaceful surrender is not peace".

Being able to share my thoughts on what I had experienced with my peers from countries such as Brazil, China, USA, Ireland, Martinique, Samoa and Canada, left me with a profound sense of hope. We had come from all walks of life but shared many of the same stories, challenges and goals. Being the only student in attendance studying theology, I thought I would be somewhat isolated. But instead, I had so many long conversations around the nuances of faith and how it can shape our resilience, that I lost count! There is something awe-inspiring about being in a room that represents the young people of much of the world. This was not a corporate event for budding diplomats and politicians. It was a gathering of people preparing for the birth of a more just world.

I am endlessly grateful for the support of UCFAMS and Christ Church Wayville who provided me the funding needed to attend this trip. We can empower our young people in the Church by giving them the resources to chase their own passions and develop into young leaders.

I am also grateful to the support and fellowship I found in my fellow traveller and Academic Dean of the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide, Rosemary Dewerse, who challenged me intellectually and also put up with my snoring! I will never forget my time in Thailand, and I have come away profoundly changed forever.

- P** – listen mindful of **perspective**
- E** – choose to **engage** with others
- A** – build **alliances** across difference
- C** – practice **compassionate** curiosity
- E** – look for **evidence** of hope

(The approach we were invited to take by Janice Leong, Regional Director for Humanitarian Affairs Asia)

**"To activate true peace we must first find it within ourselves."**

– Kim Solomon

Secretary-General, Humanitarian Affairs Asia



## Rosemary's reflection

It is quite something to attend a large gathering and, feeling the energy in the room, realise that I now count as an observer and mentor to the next generation of leaders coming through, rather than one of them. Then again, peacebuilding, and leadership in that, is a call we can all take up at any stage of our lives.

I will long remember the evidence of extraordinary resilience, determination, and transforming empathy I witnessed. Trauma was furrowed deep in our speakers, etched in their bodies, voices, hearts and minds, but their stories and wisdom were articulated with humility and compassion. We were invited by opening speaker Patricia Shafer, Executive Director of NewGen Peacebuilders, to "listen as an act of love," and that was exactly what each person present did.

I carry away with me the weight of the hard-won wisdom that was shared, conscious that to listen with love brings responsibility.

It was an enormous privilege to accompany Emelia in attending this event. She was a fantastic ambassador for the UCA in that setting – curious, engaged, warm-hearted, thoughtful. I look forward to what she will bring alive among us as a UN Peace Ambassador in 2026.

My wholehearted thanks to UCFAMS for their assistance with funding.

## Further reading

If you'd like to learn more about the event, and about the individual speakers mentioned above, here are some links:

To view a summative video of the event go to: [5th Global Peace Summit 2026](#).

Manal Omar's presentation at the 4th Global Peace Summit also. [4TH GLOBAL PEACE SUMMIT 2025 – Manal Omar](#)

For more from Emi Mahmoud see: [Emi Mahmoud – Poet | Impact Investment Strategist | Global Policy & Governance Consultant | UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador](#)

For the story of Alfred Orono Orono, see: [From child soldier, to international prosecutor and also S6 – Episode 3: My Story Gives Other Child Soldiers Hope | United Nations](#)

Mirsad Solakovic's autobiography, *The Boy Who Said Nothing: A Child's Story of Fleeing Conflict* can be purchased online or ordered through bookshops.

Find out more about The Forgotten Children of War Association, which Lejla Damon helped found, on [ZDR – Udruženje Zaboravljena djeca rata](#)

The work of Chen Alon and Sulaiman Katif is part of [Combatants for Peace](#)



“It was all about local churches offering hospitality and love in times of need – local people ministering to local people, and people supporting each other in a crisis”

# You are not alone

## Supporting rural communities

*By Rev Lawrie Linggood*

Last year farmers across the state were praying and hoping for a wet spring to enable crops and feed to grow after a very dry start to the year. This was on top of a disastrous season before.

The Presbytery of Southern SA, with the help of Synod from the Disaster Relief Fund, worked with rural congregations to help our communities suffering from the impact of the ongoing drought. In parts of the state, we experienced what is known as a ‘winter drought’ – after months of no rain the soil was too cold for anything to grow which prolonged the drought conditions.

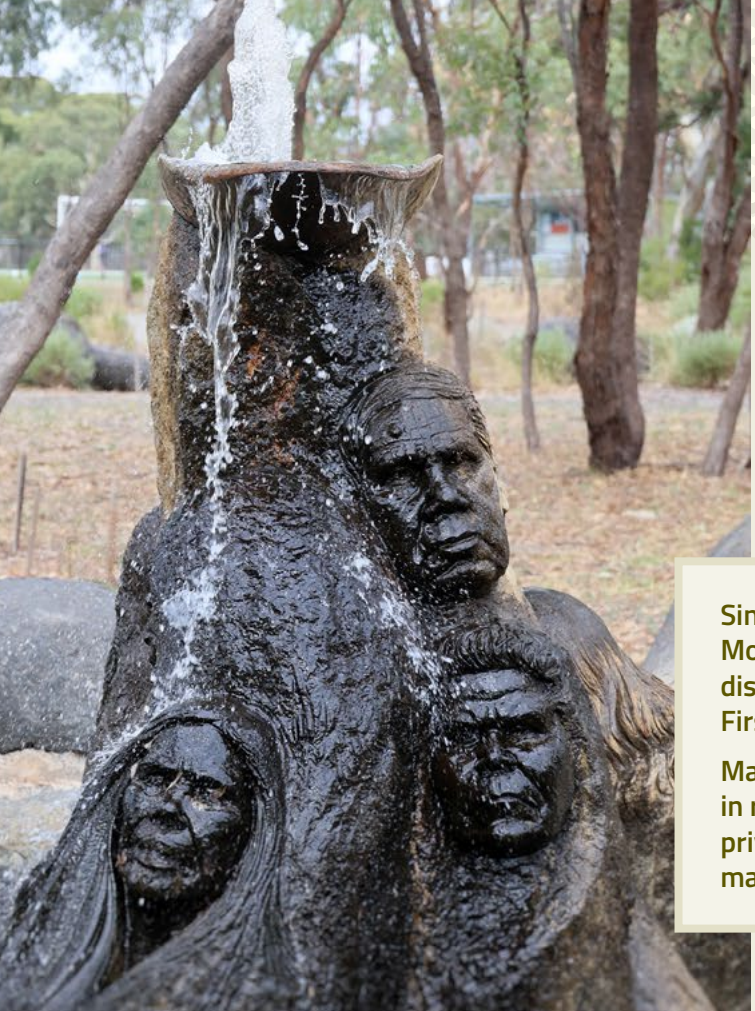
Across rural areas of our Presbytery, we heard stories of hardship and anxiety due to the lack of rain. In some areas it had been the driest period on record. Feed for animals was in short supply and was being carted from interstate at great cost, and grain crops were low. Many farmers were forced to resow crops due to strong winds which have blown away precious topsoil. For some farmers this came on the back of several bad years.

Partnering with local Uniting churches, the Presbytery ran a series of ‘You are not alone’ barbecues for farmers and those affected in rural areas, to instill hope in people during this tough period. There were other groups facilitating mental health workshops, but in many cases rural people just needed to know that there was someone to offer support and care. It was all about local churches offering hospitality and love in times of need – local people ministering to local people, and people supporting each other in a crisis; being a listening ear, sharing each other’s struggles and pains and providing an opportunity to meet with others and be in community with one another.

80 people attended the first event at Meningie in early August, followed by another 80 at an event in Murray Bridge a fortnight later. Later in the year another event was held at Meningie. This year the Presbytery continues to help farmers and communities struggling with the lack of rain, hoping and praying that 2026 will be a better season in many of our rural areas.



*Photos from the ‘You are not alone’ event held in Meningie.*



# DAY OF MOURNING

By Allen Edwards Snr

Since 2019 the Uniting Church has marked a Day of Mourning on the Sunday before 26 January to reflect on the dispossession and ongoing injustices faced by Australia's First Peoples.

Many congregations in South Australia hold special services in recognition of this day. Pilgrim Uniting Church was privileged to have Allen Edwards Snr, a Kurna and Kokatha man, and member of the congregation, share his story.

## Indigenous health data

The following data is quoted by Stan Grant in his article *The fairytale of New York* in *The Saturday Paper*, 17 January 2026:

"According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, First Nations people suffer disease at twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. They die younger – eight years younger on average; 12 years in remote areas. Two thirds of cases of fatal disease are avoidable ...

Between the ages of 30 and 64, Indigenous death rates are seven times higher than for non-Indigenous people in the same age bracket.

... suicide is the second-leading cause of death for Aboriginal boys and men. It is the leading cause of death for all Indigenous people under the age of 24. One in five kill themselves, four times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.

Nearly 60 per cent of First Nations deaths are from potentially avoidable causes. That's three times higher than for the rest of the Australian population."

We normally mourn a loss of something or someone. Right from the start, when white settlers came to Australia, Aboriginal people have started off on the back foot. The first thing that was stolen from us was our land. I have mentioned here many times our connection to Land, so to have that taken from you, right from the get-go, you can just imagine what an impact that had on us. All these years later, we are still on the back foot. We have lost many things and are still losing them. A huge impact on us was the practice of assimilation that came in in the early 1900s (see sidebar on opposite page), when children were taken away from their families and placed into homes. They lost a number of things during that time.

I talk from personal experience because my mother was one of those children. She was taken from her mother when she was seven days old and brought to Colebrook Home in Eden Hills. Like the other children there, she lost her mother, she lost her family. She lost the ability to learn her language and culture because none of the children were allowed to speak their languages or participate in cultural activities. All those things were taken from those children.

You can imagine the effect that has on your health, not only your mental health but also your physical health. You can still see the effects of those losses today through the data shown to the left.

Even my brother was taken from our mother when he was born. He didn't know that he was part of the Stolen Generation until he was 59 and the family he grew up with was not his real family. I feel so much for him. A few weeks ago, he came to the service here. After the service we had a talk and he finally started to realise what had happened. He just looked at me and said, "Allen, I don't know who I am". He explained that every year he had celebrated Australia Day on 26 January with his adopted family because he thought he was from England.

*The Pool of Tears, by sculptors Silvio Apponyi and Shereen Rankine, at Colebrook Reconciliation Park, Eden Hills.*

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This is something that we have dealt with, something we are still dealing with, and something we will continue to have to deal with. This is a generational issue. I feel a sense of loss and his sense of loss because my mother went through that as well. My children are now feeling this loss as well, knowing what my mother went through. All this has an impact on you.

Mum used to go around telling her story about her time in Colebrook Home. I heard her one day say that three of them, her, Auntie Margaret, and Auntie Ruth used to sit on the front porch at the weekend, and they would see three Aboriginal women walking up the driveway. That was their mothers! I thought that didn't happen, but mum wished and dreamt of that so much at the time that she believed that it had actually happened.

Mum was one of the lucky ones because she did get to meet her mother when she was in her twenties. But there are so many others, like my brother Ian, who have never had that opportunity, so still feel a deep sense of loss of family, something that continues.

A lot of people say that is all part of history and we can't change that. But we can move forward together and walk together. I came to realise a long time ago that we can't do these things on our own.

And since I've been part of Pilgrim, I've felt the love and care from this community. That's something I needed that I didn't realise I needed. You're all part of my journey now and I'm glad to be part of your journey as well. I look forward to what lies ahead as we work together and walk together.

## A history of the Assimilation Policy

In 1937 the Commonwealth of Australia and all the states agreed that Aboriginal people "not of full blood" should be 'absorbed' or 'assimilated' into the wider population. The goal was for Aboriginal people to eventually lose their cultural identity in the "single Australian community", and therefore to eliminate the so-called 'aboriginal problem'. This agreement was made the official policy of both state and federal governments in 1951.

A primary method to achieve assimilation was the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families by governments, welfare groups and churches, and their placement in institutions or foster homes. This practice had actually been taking place since as early as 1910 in various parts of Australia. Other methods included separate education for Aboriginal children, town curfews, alcohol bans, no social security, lower wages, State guardianship of all Aboriginal children and laws that segregated Indigenous people into separate living areas, mainly on special reserves outside towns or in remote areas.

Despite First Nations peoples being granted access to social security benefits in 1960 and federally enshrined (although non-compulsory) voting rights in 1962, it was only in 1967 that the Constitution was changed to require they be counted in the Census, and the forcible removal of children continued in some areas into the 1970s, even after the Assimilation Policy was formally abandoned in 1970. It was not until 1983 that First Nations People gained full equality with all other Australian electors, when the *Commonwealth Electoral Amendment Act 1983* made enrolling to vote at federal elections compulsory for all.

*Clive Conway*

# One Last Hurrah

## Adelaide West Men's Choir

*By Wally Woehlert*

'One Last Hurrah' was the theme for the Adelaide West Men's Choir's final concert, held on Sunday 21 December 2025 at Adelaide West Uniting Church.

The choir commenced in 2005 under the guidance and direction of Meredith Dowdy and has since proved a real gift to the church and the wider community.

It was with both sadness and gratitude that we celebrated this event and reflected on what these two decades have meant to the choir and to the many people who have had the joy of witnessing their wonderful performances.

Throughout the years, the Men's Choir has been a place of fellowship, joy and belonging. What a privilege it has been! A privilege to sing, of course, but even more so, a privilege to belong.

Over time, the choir became like family – a family of lots of men and one woman! Like any family, they experienced triumphs and endured heartaches, and they sang their way through it all.

The choir performed in services at Adelaide West and other churches in suburban Adelaide. They also sang at the bedsides of loved ones who were gravely ill.

They sang in Owen just after the 2015 Pinery bushfire, and in the audience were those who had lost homes, farms, and even family members.

When the choir began, they had no idea what the coming years would hold. They quickly discovered that singing made them feel alive, and they would go home from practices feeling uplifted and full of a newfound joy.

As they began to find their voice as a choir, their purpose began to take shape. This was at a time when many people from African countries were coming to Adelaide as refugees. These new arrivals needed support in settling into a new country and culture, and so the 'Friends of Refugees Group' was formed, financially supported by Men's Choir concerts.

A concert was held at Adelaide West Uniting Church to raise funds for an Afghan refugee family who had been torn apart by

the war in Afghanistan. Their husband and father had escaped and resettled in Adelaide ten years earlier and had been trying for years to raise money to bring his wife and four children here.

The choir heard of this situation and learnt that well over \$10,000 was needed for visa applications and travel arrangements. The concert raised a significant amount which, with other generous donations, covered all the costs and enabled the family to be reunited after 10 years.

A suggestion was made that they could take their music into country towns where many don't have the opportunity to hear live choral music. They could hold concerts and raise money for the refugee cause or for other causes meaningful to the people of each town.

“Throughout the years, the Men's Choir has been a place of fellowship, joy and belonging. What a privilege it has been! A privilege to sing, of course, but even more so, a privilege to belong.”

With that, their purpose was born. For the following years before the Covid pandemic, they presented three country concerts a year. Those trips were always filled with laughter, wonderful country food, and warm rural hospitality. The knowledge that their music helped to lift people's spirits is something that they will always treasure and carry with pride.

Their concerts took them to Port Augusta, Hawker, Meningie, Port Vincent, Berri and many other places. Along with SA country town performances, they also visited Broken Hill twice, raising funds for the Salvation Army Flying Padre Service. Those concerts will live in their memories, and in the memories of their audiences, not because they sang perfectly but because they sang with purpose.



The choir's sadness in their 'last hurrah' was real, but so too was their joy – joy for what was created, what was shared, and who they became along the way.

The choir has been honoured to lend their voices to significant moments in people's lives. The most sacred of all were the funeral services of some of their members. Standing beside grieving families and offering what comfort they could through music reminded them that songs often speak most clearly when hearts are hurting.

Over the years they lost treasured members: some who moved away, some who stepped back because of ill health, and some, sadly, who have passed on. Each departure left a hole in their circle, and a voice missing from their section. These absences were felt in their final concert and will always be honoured.

The choir's sadness in their 'last hurrah' was real, but so too was their joy – joy for what was created, what was shared, and who they became along the way. Above all, they felt grateful for the friendships, the laughter, the rehearsals where nothing went right but everything still felt okay, and even the weak jokes that surfaced with regular monotony!

On behalf of the choir, Meredith expressed how grateful they were for the audiences who supported them, and in particular for the wonderful people of Adelaide West, who would often even travel to the country towns where they were singing. The choir always felt wonderfully encouraged by their supporters.

Meredith also personally thanked the girls who joined the choir as 'honorary men'. In her view, they added a degree of class to the concerts and a new dimension to some of the songs. The many others who lent their talents to concerts over the years were also acknowledged.

Meredith closed the concert with the following remarks:

"Closing our doors after 20 years is not a decision that's been taken lightly. We feel the weight of it. But we also feel immense pride for what has been achieved here.

Personally, I am grateful for the privilege of directing this group of extraordinary men. Week after week you arrived with dedication, humour, and the willingness to work hard. Together we created something none of us could have done alone. That is a gift I will carry with me always.

Over these years I have learnt a few things about men, and here's my conclusion.

Men are very loyal, predictable, funny, often unfiltered, argumentative, and food-motivated creatures, with hearts of gold and voices of velvet. Directing them has been an absolute delight.

As we sing our final piece today, 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You', I hope you'll hear not just the notes, but the history behind them – the laughter, the hundreds of kilometres travelled, the late-night rehearsals, all the hours spent organising our music folders, and all the extra practices to get it right.

Thank you, guys, for the music, the memories, the fun, and the constant reminder that the most essential ingredient in a conductor of a male voice choir is ... patience!"



By Rev Nick Patselis  
Mission Activator – Mission Resourcing Team.

Something powerful happened at the Emerging Leaders Retreat, held January 16–18, 2026. 76 people gathered – including 57 emerging leaders from 25 congregations across South Australia – and the Spirit moved. People sensed fresh calls to ministry. Others found clarity in callings they’d been wrestling with. Leaders were blessed and commissioned for the work God is birthing in them.

The retreat’s theme, Re/Kindle, drew from Paul’s urgent words to Timothy: “Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:6–7). This became more than a theme – it was a framework for emerging leaders navigating the challenges and opportunities of ministry in our contemporary context.

Rev Michael Hands, Lead Minister of Newlife Family of Churches, led three keynote sessions exploring what it means to fan the flame of leadership, discover God’s call, and pursue God’s presence above all else.

Throughout the weekend, participants heard testimonies from both lay and ordained leaders serving within the church and offering leadership in the wider community. These stories grounded the teaching in real-life experience and demonstrated the diverse ways God calls and uses people. Practical workshops equipped leaders with hands-on skills for ministry. Times of silence and solitude created space for personal reflection and listening to God’s voice. Perhaps most significantly, deep connections and relationships were formed – the kind of spiritual friendships that will sustain these leaders long after the retreat ended.





[View all photos](#)

The retreat engaged key focus areas of our Missional Framework in tangible ways. **Faith Vitality and Formation** deepened as leaders learned to dwell in God's presence through silence, solitude, worship, and the challenge to pursue God's presence. The retreat created space for participants to be formed spiritually – not just informed about ministry – recognising that leaders can only give what they themselves receive from God. **Congregational Renewal** happened as leaders gained practical tools and theological frameworks for sustainable ministry. They returned to their churches equipped with skills for leading teams, preaching, and navigating the unique contexts of their communities, along with renewed vision for what God might do through them.

Henri Nouwen's words, shared during the retreat, continue to resonate: "The central question is, are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence?"

Based on what we witnessed at this retreat, the answer is a resounding "Yes!" The flame is being rekindled. The next generation of Uniting Church leaders is rising – not timid, but filled with power, love and self-discipline. A movement of Spirit-empowered leadership is stirring across South Australia.

*If you're an emerging leader or know someone who is, stay connected with Mission Resourcing for future opportunities to fan your flame and discover what God is birthing in you for the church.*

"Emerging Leaders Retreat was a rejuvenating weekend, fit for leaders of any experience level. It gave us an opportunity to care for our faith, investigate new skills for our ministry, and connect to a range of people from different communities."

– Emma Rundle, Westbourne Park UC

"The Emerging Leaders Retreat gave me the space to stop and intentionally ask, 'Where is God calling me, and what is God inviting me into next?'"

Throughout the retreat, I became more aware of both my strengths and my areas for growth. God used the sessions, conversations, and quiet moments to gently challenge me, particularly around how I love, serve, and lead others in the way Christ does.

I left the retreat encouraged and renewed, with a deeper sense of clarity and confidence in God's calling on my life. It reinforced for me how important it is to keep creating space for God to shape my leadership, and how vital it is that we continue to invest in and support emerging leaders as God prepares them to serve the Church into the future."

– Joshua Petrie, Encounter Church Henley



# Teeny-weeny Gallerini

By Marianne Vreugdenhil

What does an art gallery the size of a microwave have to do with Jesus' message of love?

I recently learned about John Airo, a Chicago man who built a tiny art gallery outside his studio to hold miniature art exhibitions for the enjoyment of passers-by. Inspired by the greatness of this celebration of smallness, Port Adelaide Uniting Church enthusiastically agreed to a similar project. Thanks to the dedication of fellow church member and retired design technology teacher, David Ellis, and assisted by Ian Fleming, a small, house-shaped gallery now stands in the front garden of our church. It has two parts: an **upstairs exhibition space** for local artists of all ages and abilities, and a **downstairs free art exchange** space where members of the public can take or leave an artwork.

At a time when there is so much division and fear in the world, art has the ability to help us see things from another's perspective. As such, we hope the *Teeny-weeny Gallerini* will spark conversation and connection between strangers. It also offers a pathway into the church for people with questions about faith and life.

The title of our first exhibition is *Love, Hope, Peace and Joy*, chosen because of its universal theme inspired by Jesus' ministry. It features mosaic pieces, painting, collage, glass art and embroidery by our church's community art group, CK Art. This group meets because "We hope to grow, create and learn from each other. We have lots of fun. Love, peace and joy flow about as we have time together".

On Sunday 8 February Mayor Claire Boan launched the *Teeny-weeny Gallerini* with a ribbon cutting ceremony. "How wonderful to have such a creative group of people sharing love, peace, hope and joy with the Port Adelaide community," she said. "The Teeny-weeny Gallerini will be a delight for all who pass by".

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*Harry, Kara and Natalie enjoying TwG*



*David Ellis, Mayor Claire Boan, Marianne Vreugdenhil and Rev Paul Turley at the launch*

Rev Paul Turley rounded off the celebration with an original blessing for the gallery and its ministry:

"In a world of buy and sell,  
may this be a place to take a spell.  
May it bring a moment of gentle leisure  
to lives filled with work and pressure.  
Let it always be an invitation  
to explore the great mystery of our creation.  
Light of the world, salt of the earth,  
may everyone visiting know their worth.  
In the summer, it will be steamy,  
in winter, you'll need a beanie,  
God bless this Teeny-weeny Gallerini."

We hope our little art gallery will serve as a reminder that God is present in the small as well as the big. Jesus welcomed the little children, reminded us of the value of a single lost sheep, and encouraged us with the parable of the mustard seed. As Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly sang, "From little things, big things grow".

Port Adelaide Uniting Church prays this project will help to grow good things in the community, one teeny-weeny artwork at a time.

If you would like to be involved in an exhibition, please contact project coordinator, Marianne Vreugdenhil:  
[portadelaidechurch@gmail.com](mailto:portadelaidechurch@gmail.com)

Follow us on Instagram: [@teenyweenygallerini](https://www.instagram.com/teenyweenygallerini)

Information on artists and exhibitions:  
[portadelaide.unitingchurch.org.au/teeny-weeny-gallerini](http://portadelaide.unitingchurch.org.au/teeny-weeny-gallerini)



*Cards available in free art exchange*



**Information on artists  
and exhibitions**



**Follow the exhibition on  
Instagram**

# Introducing the 2026 Synod Standing Committee



*Trevor Philips*

Wimala Presbytery

## **Where do you worship?**

When not in my placement, I worship at the Woodville Uniting Church, where my wife Rev Ann Phillips is in placement.

## **What's your current role?**

I am currently in an Intentional Interim Ministry Placement with Murray Bridge UC.

## **What are the key issues you think the Uniting Church in SA is facing? / Why did you want to join the Synod Standing Committee?**

Having been the inaugural chairperson of the Wimala Presbytery I was aware that the role and nature of the Uniting Church in the community is changing, just as society itself is changing – we are all on a journey. The presbyteries have put much work into helping with the reshaping of our congregations so they can minister more effectively in their communities. I joined the SSC because I wished to continue helping the Uniting Church in SA to evolve and be good witnesses and disciples of Christ, aided by the effective use of good governance and resources within the Synod.

## **What are you looking forward to on Synod Standing Committee?**

The SSC is a great team with a passion for the Church with a wealth of experiences and a diversity of ideas. I look forward to being a part of that team as we seek to do our part in giving guidance and structure to a changing Church.



*Marie McAllan*

Presbytery of Southern SA

## **Where do you worship?**

Willunga Uniting Church on the beautiful Fleurieu Peninsula.

## **What's your current role?**

Officially my role is as Willunga's representative to Presbytery of Southern South Australia. My favourite role is helping with Messy Church.

## **Why did you want to join Standing Committee?**

I was asked to join Standing Committee because I am female, rural and a lay person. I hope I represent all people who love Jesus and love others through the Uniting Church.

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

Keeping UCA SA Synod on track, transparent and accountable to the people of South Australia, whether they attend a church or just know of us by our service to the community.

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

Keeping it all together for the outsiders, so that there is a church for people excluded from other churches to feel included in the love of God.

# Synod Standing Committee Report

## 26 February 2026



Each Synod Standing Committee (SSC) meeting is grounded by an **Acknowledgement of Country** and by **devotions**, led each meeting by a different SSC member. This month, Andrew Telfer gave examples of different leadership styles and processes of consultation to remind us of the importance of good governance and respectful and inclusive engagement.

Andrew drew upon Ephesians 3, praying that SSC might “have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” and closed with a Lenten prayer from the President, Rev Charissa Suli.

### Pastoral matters

The Moderator, Rev Peter Morel, then discussed a range of **pastoral matters**, informing the SSC of and celebrating Jethro Buxton’s commission to Naracoorte UC; Jim Miles’ 100th birthday; the induction of the Rev Dr Cathie Lambert to the staff of Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (UCLT); and the success of the recent Emerging Leaders Retreat. The SSC was also informed of the recognition of Margaret and Gary Ferrett as Citizens of the Year by the Copper Coast Council in its 2026 Australia Day Awards for their years of inspiration and dedicated service to fostering and nurturing young people.

On a sadder note, we were asked to hold in prayer several people known to us who had recently lost members of their immediate families.

After dealing with Consent Agenda items and previous minutes and tabling correspondence, we moved on to a discussion of the 2026/30 Strategic Plan which is currently under development. The General Secretary, Rev Philip Gardner, updated us on the current progress of the plan. The intention is to present a final draft of the plan to the next SSC for consideration, so that it can go to Synod in June for approval.

### Regular reports

Associate General Secretary Placements and Safe Church (AGSPSC), Rev Andrew Robertson explained the recent Department of Human Services decision that they would no longer carry out General Probity and Vulnerable Persons Checks, and the implications of that decision.

Rev Sue Page, Associate General Secretary Governance and Operations, then gave her report which included the ongoing review of By-Laws, and celebrated the admission of Rev Dr Bart Brueher as a Deacon.

In his report, the Moderator updated us on his recent activities, including his many meetings and school visits; the Emerging Leaders Retreat; the University of Divinity Graduation ceremony; the commissioning of the new Divisional Commander of the Salvation Army in SA; a dinner at Lincoln College for academic award presentations; and various Board appointments. The Moderator commented that it was “a privilege to be out and about representing the UCASA”.

In the General Secretary’s report, Rev Phillip Gardner discussed better alignment of the New Church and Ministry Development Fund with the MAPS project; tabled new Terms of Reference for the Synod Strategic Oversight Group for discussion, and sought affirmation from the SSC for the reappointment of Mark Waters to the Board of UnitingCare Australia and Rev Dr Ian Price as a Director of Adelaide Community Healthcare Alliance Incorporated (ACHA).

This was then followed by the regular reports from Mark Waters of UnitingCare SA, Rev Prof Vicky Balabanski for Uniting College of Leadership and Theology and Rev Jenni Hughes for Mission Resourcing. Vicky Bakabanski reported on Sean Gilbert’s retirement as Director of Pastoral Theology and Ministry and Cathie Lambert’s appointment to that role; and Elissa Ingliss’s prize for her history essay in the University of Divinity graduation awards.

Jenni Hughes reported on the forthcoming visit by members of the SA church to South Korea, this year’s Justice, Mission and Theology focus on anti-gambling and domestic, family and sexual violence and changes to UC Fellowship and Mission Support.

The meeting closed with a brief review and closing prayers.

*Clive Conway*

# QUICK BITES

## UnitingCare SA Pancake Day

On **Shrove Tuesday**, **UnitingCare SA** kicked off their annual Pancake Day fundraising campaign with a launch event in the city. We were blessed with a prime location and fantastic hosts at Scots Church on North Terrace. Adelaide University O'Week brought streams of students eager for a free pancake. Many were happy to stay for a chat, too.

It was a fantastic opportunity to connect with the community and promote the vital work of our Relief Centres, which provide hot meals, food parcels, and other resources for people in need.

Pancake Day doesn't end there – it's a season of fundraising events that runs until the end of June. UnitingCare SA encourages churches, schools, sporting clubs, businesses, and other community groups to get involved by hosting their own events over the coming months.



[More photos](#)

## The Future of Progressive Christianity

On **5 February** at the **Effective Living Centre** in Wayville, two young women with very different Christian journeys spoke on *The Future of Progressive Christianity: Generation Y, Z and onwards*.

Ella spoke about the challenges of being progressive in her more conservative church, and how she seeks to navigate both spaces with compassion and curiosity, supporting young people who feel torn between their church and identity.

Emelia contextualised the challenges and opportunities that both progressive faith communities and younger people are facing, advocating forms of inclusive orthodoxy, a willingness to embrace change, and the importance of collaborative local resource sharing.



## Sean Gilbert's farewell

On **Wednesday 17 December**, a farewell service was held at **Uniting College for Leadership and Theology** to celebrate the ministry of Rev Dr Sean Gilbert, his passion for teaching and devotion to his students, and his immense contribution to the life of the college and church in general.

We wish you all the best in your retirement, Sean, and we hope that we will continue to benefit from your wisdom and insight.



[More photos](#)

## Elissa Inglis wins essay prize

Congratulations to **Rev Elissa Inglis**, who has been awarded the **Geoff Barnes Memorial Prize** in History for 2025, for her essay *Australian Indigenous Theology in Dialogue with the Pietist Tradition*.

The prize is awarded each year to the best historical essay by a student enrolled in one of the UCA theological colleges. It is named in honour of Rev Dr Geoff Barnes (1926–2005), who was ordained as a Congregational Minister, and served as Principal of Camden Theological College and Moderator of the NSW Synod.



Help us stay connected by sending your brief news items and accompanying photographs to [engagement@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:engagement@sa.uca.org.au)

## Rev Vicki Aitken's induction

Congratulations to Rev Vicki Aitken on her induction at **Pilgrim Uniting Church**. The congregation welcomed Vicki at an afternoon service on **Sunday 15 February**, where Rev Leanne Jenski was guest preacher.



## Rev Craig Schultz-Vlaholias's induction

On **Sunday 18 January**, Rev Craig Schultz-Vlaholias was inducted at **Brighton Uniting Church**. Rev Dr Phil Carr was guest preacher at the service, and Rev Lynne Aird presented Craig with a beautiful stole featuring imagery of a lion and lamb. Congratulations, Craig!



## Rev Dr Cathie Lambert joins UCLT

On **Wednesday 25 February**, at the first Chapel service of the new term, the **Uniting College of Leadership and Theology** welcomed Rev Dr Cathie Lambert to the College, and the Moderator formally inducted her into her new role as Director of Pastoral Theology & Ministry Practice.

Welcome, Cathie!

## Talk About the Voice

On **Sunday 22 February**, **Blackwood Uniting Church** hosted a forum on the South Australian First Nations Voice to Parliament. The event, called *Talk About the Voice*, was held in conjunction with the Blackwood Reconciliation Group.

Special guests Allen Edwards, Iain Seymour, and BRG secretary Anne Barkaway participated in a Yarning Circle where they answered questions and shared their thoughts.

## Ash Wednesday Lament

The **Ash Wednesday** service at **Unley Uniting Church** was both uplifting and challenging. It was a cooperative effort between local churches, led by Emelia Haskey from Unley UC and Rev Richard Telfer from Church of the Trinity, Goodwood, with musical accompaniment provided by Peter Murchland from Rosefield UC. The service included a thought-provoking *Lament for a Planet in Peril*, written by Rev Dr Jonathan Barker.



## Pilgrim Uniting Church Choir tour

From **late December to early January**, members of the **Pilgrim Uniting Church Choir** travelled around England to sing in some of the country's most beautiful cathedrals. They enjoyed immersing themselves in the rich history of these buildings and sharing choral music at evensong and Eucharist services.

Singing to a packed crowd under the magnificent dome of St Paul's Cathedral was a highlight for many of them. Their tour also took them to Liverpool, Chester, Worcester, Hereford, Canterbury, and Windsor.

Now back in Adelaide, the Choir (led by director Peter Kelsall) continue to sing at weekly services at Pilgrim Uniting Church. They have also put together a tour film with footage from the trip.



[More photos](#)



[More photos](#)



# FROM THE VAULT

## New Times

From New Times, November 1982

### New possibilities for religious television in SA

The Uniting Church in South Australia is considering a new thrust in religious television programmes. Among the programmes being considered are:

**Dr. Who:** a documentary on the life of the Moderator.  
**60 Minutes:** Conflicts erupt in a suburban church when the preacher goes over-time.

**Get Smart:** A 10-part series on Uniting Church policy and practice, from Parkin Wesley Theological College.

**MASH:** In the new Uniting Church series, Radar O'Reilly is called the Secretary of the Synod, and "Hot Lips" Hoolihan takes over as Director of Nursing at Memorial Hospital.

**The Price is Right:** A report on how parishes make decisions on closure of churches since church union.

**Sale of the Century:** What happens when Adelaide Central Mission is offered a price of \$2 million for the Franklin Street site by the TAB?

**Dynasty:** A Uniting Church minister and his family resist presbytery efforts to remove him from a 15-year settlement in a wealthy suburban church.

**The Naked Vicar Show:** UCA minister demonstrates against Taxation Department's refusal to allow clerical clothing as a tax deduction. Viewer discretion advised.

**Bless This House:** Excerpts from the best dedication services of new churches over the past 15 years.

**Wheel of Fortune:** Leading Australian theologians discuss the present relevance of Ezekiel's visions.

**Happy Days:** Leading Uniting Church lay men and women reflect on life before union.

**The Young and the Restless:** Takes you behind the scenes to show what it's really like to get ready for a Sunday School anniversary.

**A Country Practice:** How a newly ordained minister survives his first year in an outback parish.

**Days of our Lives:** Tension and drama as we follow a hospital chaplain through his day's work.

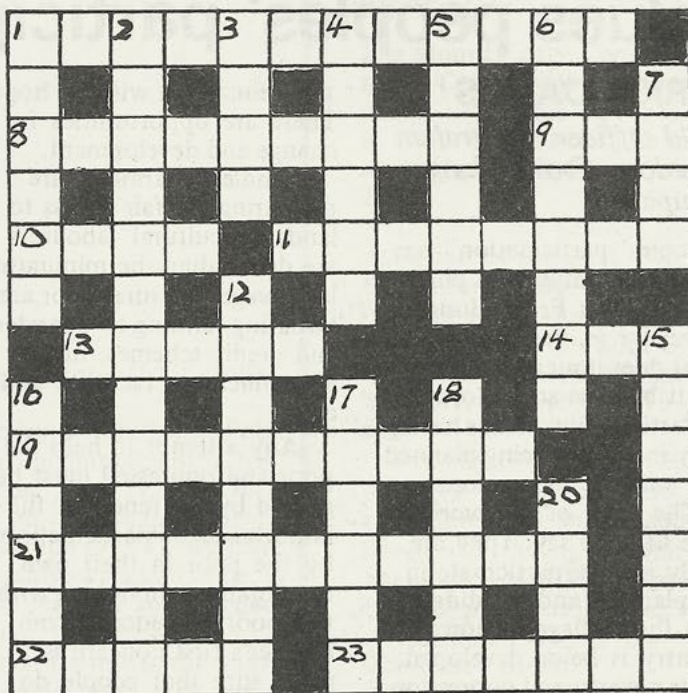
**Disneyland:** Tall tales and true from the magical kingdom. Visit Adventureland, as Geoffrey Scott attempts to explain the Assembly's motion on Militarism; Frontierland, as we look at ministry in the mining towns; Tomorrowland, as church leaders debate whether we should clone regular church attenders and tithers; and Fantasyland as New Times makes a takeover bid for The News.

**The Big League:** Thrill to the excitement of a behind-the-scenes-look at the people and dealings of the Synod Standing Committee. Some language may be unsuitable for younger viewers.

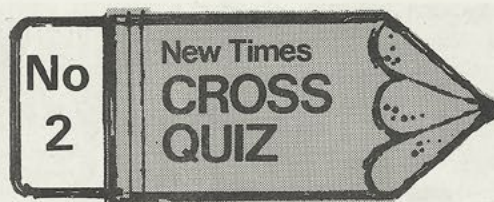
Do any readers have suggestions for future programmes?

Peter Horsfield.

*Peter Horsfield, a Brisbane suburban parish Uniting Church minister, has recently returned from America where he completed his doctorate in theology and media. This article has been adapted to include South Australian identities and place names.*



10/New Times, September 1982



#### ACROSS

- 1 "Four for the .../ Three, three the rivals;/ Two, two the lily-white boys clothed all in green-o;/ One is one and all alone and evermore shall be so. (Traditional song: "Green grow the rushes-o").
- 8 Which European city was founded as St. Petersburg by Peter The Great in A.D. 1703?
- 9 In a living organism, what is a bag-like cavity enclosed by a membrane?
- 10 "And how can man die better/Than facing fearful .../For the ashes of his fathers,/And the temples of his Gods? (T.B. Macaulay: The Lays of Ancient Rome: "Horatius").
- 11 When the lamp is shattered/The light in the dust lies dead-/When the cloud is scattered/The ... glory is shed. (P.B. Shelley: Lines).
- 13 "We have followed too much the devices and desires ... own hearts." (The Book of Common Prayer: "Prayer of General Confession").
- 14 "A time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to ... (Old Testament: Ecclesiastes).
- 19 Which medical term for inflammation of the eye was given as a name by Ernest Giles to a low mountain range in Western Australia?
- 21 Which London dock area on the south bank of the Thames across the river from Wapping is linked with the north bank by two tunnels?
- 22 Which country of the ancient world developed

a great civilization after it was united by Menes about 3,200 B.C.?

- 23 In metallurgy, what adjective means "mixed with baser metal"?

#### DOWN

- 1 Which Roman Catholic archbishop became in 1946 the first Australian cardinal?
- 2 Which ecclesiastical Council held in A.D. 664 in Yorkshire marked the triumph of the Romans over the Celtic form of Christianity in England?
- 3 What is the highest active volcano in Europe?
- 4 "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this ... shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (New Testament: The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians).
- 5 Which town in the South Australian presbytery of Wakefield, formerly associated with copper-mining, has a name meaning "lizard plain"?
- 6 What is the term for that part of a liturgy said or sung in answer to a priest?
- 7 What shortened title is commonly given to the second of St. Luke's biblical writings?
- 12 Which English saint, who died in A.D. 687, began life as a shepherd of Northumbria, but later travelled widely as a missionary and became known as the "wonder-worker of Britain"?

- 15 Which other saintly son of Northumbria attended 2 down, where he defended the Roman cause?
- 16 Which Victorian metropolitan presbytery is named after that Governor of New South Wales who in 1837 visited the site of the capital and called it "Melbourne"?
- 17 To which lady did the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace address a poem written from the Westminster gatehouse prison in 1642?
- 18 What is the female organ of a flower, comprising ovary, style and stigma?
- 20 "Blest inhabitants of Zion,/washed in their Redeemer's blood;/Jesus, whom their soul ... on,/ makes them kings and priests to God. (Hymn by J. Newton in The Australian Hymn Book).



View the solutions to the crossword

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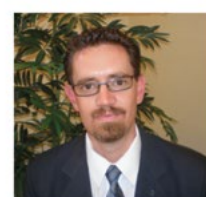
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Geoff Lewis  
General Manager



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## Placements News

### Placements Finalised as at 17 February 2026

Rev Vicki Aitken to Pilgrim UC from 1 February 2026

Emelia Haskey (MOP) to Unley UC (0.3FTE) from 1 February 2026

Rev Emily Hayes to Salisbury UC from 1 March 2026

**Advertised Placements:** Please see Positions Vacant for more details: [sa.uca.org.au/uc-positions-vacant](http://sa.uca.org.au/uc-positions-vacant)

### PROFILES AVAILABLE

#### Generate Presbytery

Ceduna UC (0.6)

Flinders (0.4–0.6)

*Booleroo Centre UC, Booleroo Whim UC, Quorn UC,  
Wirrabara UC, Wilmington UC*

Kangaroo Island Linked Congregations (0.8)

Port Augusta (0.4)

#### Presbytery of Southern SA

—

#### Wimala Presbytery

Goyder Ministry Area (0.5)

*Clements Gap UC, Hallett UC, Jamestown UC, Orroroo UC,  
Whyte Yarcowie UC*

Wesley UC Kent Town (0.5)

*For more information about placements,*

*please visit [sa.uca.org.au/placements/placements-vacant-and-finalised](http://sa.uca.org.au/placements/placements-vacant-and-finalised)*

ISSN 0726-2612

*New Times* is the voice of Uniting Church in SA. Published quarterly, it 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 or the Synod of South Australia.

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The Uniting Church in Australia  
**Synod of South Australia**