

e-Tree



An online magazine for the congregations within the Parramatta Mission, Uniting Church in Australia.

Number 1: February 2016.

Welcome to the first edition of **e-Tree**. Our desire is to keep you aware of what is happening in the life of our congregations and the wider church. **e-Tree** will be published four times per year.

How did e-tree get its name?

The image of a 'tree' was recently adopted by Parramatta Mission as an emblem of its core values - and of the diverse, fertile and inclusive nature of its Christ-centred work. The 'branches' of that tree - including its three congregations: Leigh Memorial, Leigh Fijian, Westmead - and a Korean Faith Community - are crucial both to maintaining the tree's balance and to strengthening its foundations or 'roots'.

From an historical point of view, the Mission's Macquarie Street site started as a garden, with nineteenth century congregations also holding markets under trees in Parramatta Park to raise important church funds. Recently, the congregations of Parramatta Mission have gathered at a large tree in Parramatta Park for some combined services and heritage celebrations.

Making Ready

We are inclined to think of Advent as a time for 'making ready' and 'preparing the way' for the birth of Christ into the world. It might come as a surprise to know that the way in which we observe Christmas with mangers "and the works" has only evolved from the late twelfth century / early thirteenth century onwards.

The "main event" was Easter. The observance of Christ's passion (his suffering and the cross), Holy Saturday and the resurrection on Sunday was the primary season of the Christian year. It seems to have been the time when baptisms took place and was accompanied by a renewal of baptismal vows.



Lent is the season which begins on Ash Wednesday and comes to a close with Holy Saturday. Its purpose is to prepare the follower of Christ for the core confessions of our faith: the death and resurrection of Christ and what that signifies for us. It has been practised as a time of repentance, fasting and almsgiving.

For a quick 2 minute video on Ash Wednesday, click here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3L3c23MfC0>

In Cambridge Ash Wednesday is marked by college choirs opening the service with the singing of Alleghri's *Miserere* (a setting of Psalm 51). To attend the Ash Wednesday service at Kings College you need to queue for several hours beforehand in order to get entry into the chapel.

Check out these versions: (St John's College and then King's College).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5t_yZqpCQrM

<http://mp3tunes.org/mp3/miserere%20gregorio%20allegri%20john%20rutner>

For further explanations about Lent, click the following:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent>

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/what-is-lent-when-is-it-held-and-how-long-does-it-go-for-20160208-gmp08n.html>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/religion/christianity/lent.shtml>

<http://www.catholic.org/clife/lent/>



ACT to give some of the world's poorest people the power to create change.

REFLECT on the Scriptures, the global church, and one's life & impact on the world.

CONNECT with one's community, God's spirit & our global partners for change.

Lent Event is a community-based initiative that began in 2005, founded by Sarah White of Sydney with the support of West Epping Uniting Church. Sarah perceived a need to help people in least developed countries and, to raise money, proposed a variation on the Christian habit of giving up luxuries for Lent by asking people to donate the value of their forgone luxury.

Lent Event

Over the last several years our congregations have observed Lent Event. It has become an important period in the lives of many Uniting Churches and appeals to young and old. It is designed to bring together prayer, worship and connected action. Why not check out the Lent event website?

<http://www.lentevent.com/>

Music for Lent

There have been quite a number of contemporary Christian musicians who have composed songs for Lent.

Why not check out the following?

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has composed an electronic list which is a mix of traditional and contemporary. You can click on some to hear a version sung.

<http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/songs-for-lent>

Michael John Poirier

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=len+t+music&view=detail&mid=64911B9E12340D3CC67664911B9E12340D3CC676&FORM=VIRE1>

Chris Tomlin

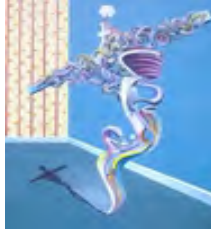
<https://anglicanprayer.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/music-for-lent-chris-tomlin-at-the-cross-love-ran-red-brand-new/>

For a personal Lenten discipline the words of Brian Wren's contemporary Good Friday hymn, "Here hangs a man discarded" is well worth reflecting on.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oza5iOPtQkA>

Lenten Studies 2016

Exploring Luke's telling of an "idle tale".



Oliver Perry ©

The way in which the gospel of Luke records the passion and resurrection of Jesus is distinctive. Clive Pearson will lead a 2 week study exploring how and why this is so. This study is an opportunity for you to become more deeply immersed in Luke's version of the story which will inform our worship for this Easter season.

Timing: 10 am – 12 noon, Wednesday 9 and 16 March;
09 am – 11:00 am, Saturday and 19 March.

Venue: "Back Room", Leigh Memorial Church, Macquarie Street, Parramatta, (entrance via the church).

Leigh is close by the Parramatta bus and train interchange.

Open: To anyone who is interested.

The People's Climate March

The People's Climate March was held on the last Sunday in November 2015. Members of the Fijian congregation were well represented. This report comes from the Revd. Dr Sef Carroll from Uniting World.

The People's Climate March in Sydney brought more than one thousand Pacific Islanders together. Their presence was a bold response to our Pacific partner churches request for solidarity, support and advocacy on the issue of the devastating effects of climate change. It was the first time (other than for rugby) in Australia that Pacific Islanders have come together in solidarity for a particular issue. For many islanders it was an empowering, inspiring and proud moment to stand together with one voice on a particular issue. This significant achievement is due to the work of key Pacific Island UCA ministers, community leaders and artists, and organisations such as Pacific Climate Warriors and Sydney Alliance. Uniting World was proud to stand alongside and in support of our Pacific Island congregations in the diaspora and also our church partners in the Pacific.

But the work for climate justice does not end with the People's Climate March. In a significant way, the climate march has been the start of a process of mobilising our diaspora Pacific communities to become involved in climate justice and advocacy. It is a collective hope that we can be a stronger community here in Australia doing our part in keeping the human face of climate change at the forefront of climate change debate and policy.



<http://www.unitingworld.org.au/pacificchange/?v=2>

UnitingWorld is committed to ongoing climate justice and advocacy through continuing engagement with our Pacific diaspora communities. This work has already begun. In the new year UCA Pacific Island ministers and leaders have met to explore and develop a plan of action for ongoing advocacy. The first of these activities in the pilot of an International *Talanoa* (conversation) on climate change issues on February 26.

Over the course of 2016 – from May to November – UnitingWorld, in partnership with the Pacific Conference of Churches will be running a series of five workshops on climate disaster and recovery in five countries. The project is called ‘Navigating the Tides’. It has three distinct and inter-related components. These are Disaster Recovery, Climate Induced Disaster Risk Assessments (training for conducting vulnerability assessments) and a theology of stewardship as care for the environment and people. The first of these five workshops is scheduled to take place in Tuvalu from the 23rd to the 27th May.

Who do you think you are?



The Uniting Church declared itself to be a multicultural church back in 1985. It has passed many resolutions since then designed to encourage us to become a church which lives cross-culturally.

Check out the relevant Assembly website at:

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/mcm>

Also, check out the website of the Christ and Cultures Gathering:



<http://ccgathering.org/>

One of the features of being a mix of cultures is that we often do not know much about the background of the people who have migrated to Australia and are now part of us.

What follows is a conversation with William Mateo (pictured below with his family)



Q. Where were you baptized?

William: I was baptized when I was an infant. I am still in search of my baptismal certificate which was signed by my godparents and the minister of the church at that time. I was baptized in the United Methodist Church of Padapada

with my parents and godparents surrounding me (as is the custom I have seen throughout the time I have been in the church). The minister usually pours water on the infant's head (by washing the head three times) and proclaims the child to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit after making the sign of the cross on the forehead.

To find out more about the United Methodist Church of the Philippines, see:

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines_Central_Conference_\(United_Methodist_Church\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippines_Central_Conference_(United_Methodist_Church))

Q: Do you know much about the history of the church?

William: As my mother tells me it was founded by my great grandfather. The land where the church was built was donated by my great grandparents, Mr and Mrs Juan (John) and Lucadia Tababa. The land which was next to the church was bought by my parents from my grandparents. When the time came to migrate to Australia, my parents donated the land to the church. The land was developed by the church and they built a child care centre which then became a pre-school. (I am not sure of how big the enrolment is – my guess would be 20 children.

Q: When was the last time you visited and worshipped in that church?

William: We had a great reunion last July (2015); we celebrated my grandmother, Mrs Maria Tababa Aganon who called herself the "Bible Woman" of the church. She passed away at the age of 92. She was the youngest child out of three siblings. I have heard of reports that church has grown in members compared with previous years. There are 2 other churches which are linked to this main church (sister

churches); they are situated in the surrounding hills of the village / province.



Q: In what ways is it the same as Leigh Memorial?

William: I can compare the congregations at Westmead and Leigh Memorial similar to the sister churches in Padapada and the surrounding villages. The congregations have similar liturgies, including songs, prayers, communion, the passing of the peace, and baptism. There was a time when there was a choir singing and youth dancing which is part of the gathering of people which still exists today. The church organises fundraising activities to help the members who are in need.

Q: In what ways does it differ?

William: The church is situated along the highway and there is a lot of noise during the worship service. As a result it can be hard to hear the message at times. The congregation is mainly attended by women and a few men. The congregation might be around at least 50 people at the worship service; there might be 4 or 5 men attending including myself. There are some young people who have about the same ratio of gender (say 10 females to 2 males).

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

William: My grandparents were one of the founders of the church. The church began its ministry at the top of the mountain which was made

of Nipa (bamboo material). Unfortunately it burnt down. My mother does not know the cause of the fire. The church was rebuilt on the highway which is down on the plains for people in order to have easy access to the church. It was rebuilt three times as they sought to discern the best position for the church. The way it stands today is with the front door facing the highway in order to welcome people. The congregation grew to 150 people compared with only a few families having been worshipping previously. There are two services – early morning, 7 am and then again at 9 am. The school next to the church operates with 2 sessions of class time for 16 students with just one teacher.

There are activities like Bible study groups, pastoral ministry, visiting families in their home and in hospital. There are particular activities for younger and older women. The Lenten event is practised through a rotation of ministers in the surrounding areas by preaching and teaching the Word.

My mother mentioned the natural beauty of flowers on the altar every Sunday.

Sport and Faith.

What has faith got to do with sport? Well may you ask. In fact, the apostle Paul was not shy about making connections: think of his invitation to run the straight race. Over the next few issues of *E-Tree* we will explore this theme a bit more but, in the meantime



Who do we sing for?

It is well known at Leigh Memorial that I am a Western Sydney Wanderers Football (soccer) "tragic." I possess the full range of red and black supporters' gear, attend matches and marches and can sing along with most of the Wanderers' songs. The Wanderers were "born" at the Wool Pack Inn, Parramatta in 2012 after Sydney FC reneged on the agreement for Parramatta stadium to be their home ground. The colours for the new team, along with their name, values, culture of the club and playing style were discussed at public forums across western Sydney. The name Western Sydney Wanderers was chosen in recognition of the first registered soccer club in Australia; the Wanderers Football Club in Parramatta. Going to a Wanderers game is a real family event for us, along with a lot of other people in western Sydney we put on the red and black and join the crowd walking through Parramatta to the stadium. Shops along the way are decorated with red and black flags, signs splashed across the windows announce "We sing for Wanderers," and there is energy and anticipation from the hundreds of Wanderer supporters who crowd the cafes. We usually stop somewhere for dinner in a café in Eat Street, they are all filled with Wanderers supporters.

Occasionally we hear the drumming and singing of the Red and Black Block (RBB – the active supporters of team) as they march to Wanderland (Pirtek Stadium) and we step in behind them and join in, singing and waving our scarves.

At the game the atmosphere is amazing. We say hello to people who sit around us who we only meet at this venue and tear up our programs so we have “confetti” to throw in the air when our team scores a goal. The stands fill up with families, singles, and groups of friends, old people, young kids and babies, people whose families have lived many generations in Australia and people who have newly arrived. Soccer really is the world game; people from every ethnic background join together at Wanderland to cheer on our team. Despite our many differences, across the diversity amongst supporters, we are united as one in our support for our team.

Before the game starts, the ground announcer calls the first name of each Wanderer player, he doesn't say the player's surname; the crowd roars it back to him. Spontaneously the crowd stands and cheers when the players run onto the field, a real display of support and respect. On occasions when something significant has happened in our community such as the shooting of police worker Curtis Cheng, devastating bushfires or the death of a member of the RBB, we stand and pause as a community and acknowledge this together. Clearly we belong, we support one another, we (Wanderers fans) are very aware that we are a community.

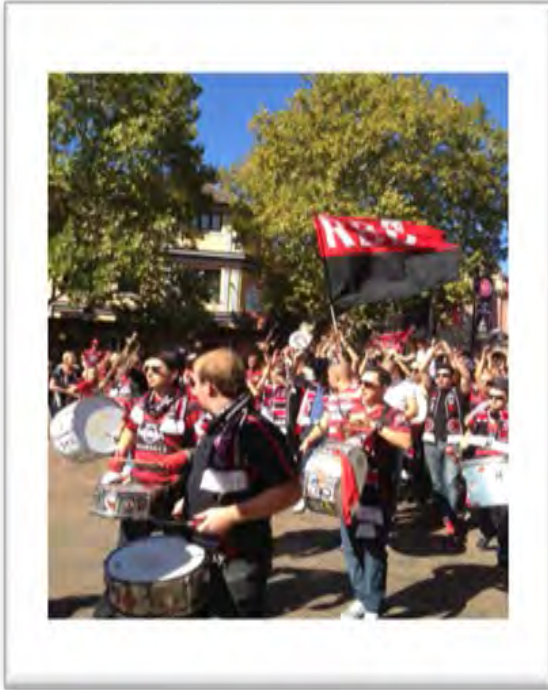
The referee blows the whistle to start the game, in the Northern stand the RBB unfurl massive flags, or protest signs, the drum and trumpet start, Campo (choir

master of the RBB) stands shirtless with his back to the game and leads the RBB in enthusiastic singing and energetic dancing that continues for the duration of the 90 minute game. The songs have themes of pride about who we are and celebrate that we live in (the much maligned) western Sydney; commitment to the team and each other; and hope for the success of our team. A unique

Wanderer tradition celebrated at home and away games alike, is the Poznan. At the 80th minute mark of the match, in recognition of the first ever game of soccer in Australia played here in Parramatta by the original Wanderers FC, the RBB lead supporters in turning our backs on the game for a minute of jumping up and down with our arms around the shoulders of the people on either side of us. We are united as in the celebration of our history every week.

At some point during the first half of the match, the RBB challenge us to join the singing. The RBB wave their hands to supporters in the Eastern stand and bellow, “WHO DO WE SING FOR?” The thunderous reply... “WE SING FOR WANDERERS” echoes around the stadium as each stand responds to the call. The air seems to vibrate around us, its electric. The level of passion amazes me. At the end of the game the crowd acknowledges the players with lots of cheering and clapping and then as a sign of appreciation and mutual respect, the players line up in front of the RBB, join hands and bow to them. This public acknowledgment of the role of the RBB strengthens the bonds between players and supporters.

The game of soccer is good, especially this year with 9 wins and a draw in a row before we were robbed of a win last week by less than



adequate calls by the referee.... I go to the game for the atmosphere as much as the game. When my son Kevin signed up as a foundation member in 2012 he quickly began encouraging me to attend matches with him. He knows I enjoy football, but what he wanted to share with me was the atmosphere amongst Wanderers' supporters: excitement, enthusiasm, belonging, connection and hope.

This weekend many members of our family; Keith, my son Kevin, his girl-friend Samantha and her brother Olivier, as well as 2 families from school will be kitting up, enjoying dinner together before the game and yelling ourselves hoarse for 90 minutes.

Who do we sing for? We sing for Wanderers!

Julie Hamilton

For more on the Wanderers, click below;

<http://www.wswanderersfc.com.au>

Transforming Lives in the City of Parramatta:

A History of Parramatta Mission, 1815 – 2015

Driving along Macquarie Street, Parramatta, from East to West, a Victorian Gothic 'cathedral' church soon comes into view. It is as a grand architectural anomaly – squashed between two inelegant buildings and clearly at odds with its more beaten surroundings. Like a magnificent, unearthed artefact from a distant time, its sandstone walls, distinctive front doors, crumbling gargoyles, stained glass windows and empty steeple parapet loom from the bitumen below and seek our attention. Nearby signs read: "Parramatta Mission", "Leigh Memorial Church" and "Meals Plus". Passers-by stop and look around. They find themselves wondering: "What is this church doing here?"... "What does 'Leigh Memorial' mean?"... "What does Parramatta Mission have to do with it?"... "What is this place?" Traffic flows past - work or shopping beckons. The passers-by move on. The church remains.



Since 2014, I've been enrolled as a doctoral student at the United Theological College in North Parramatta – a campus of Charles Sturt University. My research

involves exploring, along both chronological and thematic lines, the two hundred year history of Parramatta Mission and the nexus between that history and the socio-cultural and civic history of Parramatta (1815 – 2015). It is a timely project, occurring when the Mission and Australian Methodism are acknowledging the bicentenary of Samuel Leigh's arrival – and when

Parramatta is experiencing the early phases of a large-scale urban re-development. This includes – among other ground-breaking architectural projects – the creation of the 'Parramatta Square' precinct on the Mission's doorstep. Aimed at meeting twenty-first century demands and beyond, this civic transformation has required the Mission to re-open, re-imagine and re-position itself – and its past – or as Winston Churchill once suggested: "the farther back you can look, the father forward you are likely to see."

Of course, by international standards and those of Australia's indigenous community, the Mission's history may be timely, diverse and under intense examination, but it is also relatively short. Its two hundred years are like the blink of an eye. Yet, in the context of Methodist and Uniting Church history in Australia – the Mission and Parramatta represent something long, distinguished and perhaps even more remarkable for having emerged in good condition from the rawness of colonialism and/or the ingloriousness of a convict past.

Similarly, the Mission's history has reflected, influenced and shared many of the same events, preoccupations, pains and achievements of the city which shares its name. For decades between the mid

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – the executive echelons of both Leigh Memorial church and Parramatta Council, in addition to other Parramatta civic boards, were filled with mutually familiar faces. Moreover, the influence of tee-totalling, upright Methodism on government practices of the time was also clearly apparent in Parramatta and made for some decidedly juicy stoushes between denominations/ political factions and their impassioned representatives. The mid-1800s' battle for Parramatta Council supremacy between James Byrnes (local Methodist/ civic luminary and Mill owner) and Hugh Taylor (Catholic convert and local Publican) is a colourful case in point.

Such multi-faceted explorations of the Mission's history have nonetheless made my role as an 'insider' historian consistently challenging. Due to familial bonds and a strong personal interest and affiliation with the subject of my research – maintaining adequate 'perspective' has required effort. That said, passion and belief are not necessarily drawbacks in history writing. Renowned American historian Barbara Tuchman in fact suggested that all truly good history writing requires some form of authorial "fascination" with its subject in order to enliven, resonate and teach – and I agree. I don't think that I could write about history in any other way. It is both permissible and enjoyable to love one's subject and I love researching and writing about the history of Parramatta Mission. Having originated with something as basic as an itinerant English preacher on horseback – and with something as inconspicuous and hopeful as a little convict-built chapel on a Parramatta street – there couldn't be much more to love, could there?

This article acknowledges the following sources:

1. Kass, T; Liston, C & McClymont, J; Parramatta – A Past Revealed (1996). Parramatta NSW: Parramatta City Council publication;

2) Tuchman, B. W., (1981) 'In search of history', In Practicing history, Selected Essays. London: MacMillan; 3) The Life of Winston Churchill (The Churchill Centre)

<https://www.winstonchurchill.org/images/pdfs/for.../churchillbooklet.pdf>.

Liz de Reland



Amazing Grace

One of the most memorable renditions of Amazing Grace was sung by President Barak Obama at the funeral of Rev. Clementa Pinckney. (See: <http://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000003766925/obama-sings-amazing-grace-.html>)

The hymn, of course, one of the all-time classics. It was composed by John Newton (1725-1807). It reflected his own personal experience which was rather removed from that of those who would subsequently own this hymn as one of their personal favourites.

Newton grew up without any particular religious convictions. His mother had died when he was 6 years of age. He was raised by his step-mother; his father was away at the sea and he was sent to a boarding school where he was mistreated.

Newton was conscripted into the Royal Navy and then became involved in the

Atlantic slave trade. He was known for being rather disobedient, insubordinate, and rather gifted at creating obscene songs and poems.

His conversion to the Christian faith came about during a severe storm of the Irish coast: he called out to God for mercy. For another seven or eight years he continued to ply the slave trade. He became the captain of a ship which sailed up rivers in Africa and procured slaves who were then on-sold.



[John Newton](#) in his later years

Newton left the sea in 1755 and began to teach himself Latin, Greek and theology. He was ordained into the Church of England in 1764 and soon began to compose hymns in association with the poet William Cowper. The hymn Amazing Grace was written to illustrate a sermon for New Year's Day 1773. We do not know what tune the words were set to at that time.

The hymn did not initially attract a great deal of attention. In the early nineteenth century it was sung a great deal in the United States during a revival movement and was set to the tune we now know in 1835.

And, as for Newton, he became active in the anti-slavery movement and campaigned with William Wilberforce for its abolition.

The hymn has since acquired great popularity and has been recorded by many artists, including Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Mahalia Jackson, Rod Stewart, Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley.

Sing a new song – kind of ...

One newer version of Amazing Grace is by Chris Tomlin. It differs from the original insofar as it includes a chorus which begins “my chains are gone, I’ve been set free”. Tomlin was declared to be the most sung songwriter for the year in 2013.

Click here for “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”/

[http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=chris+tomlin+amazing+grace+\(my+chains+are+gone\)+\(see+the+morning+album+version\)&view=detail&mid=6265B6A904FF90911D056265B6A904FF90911D05&FORM=VIRE4](http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=chris+tomlin+amazing+grace+(my+chains+are+gone)+(see+the+morning+album+version)&view=detail&mid=6265B6A904FF90911D056265B6A904FF90911D05&FORM=VIRE4)

Chris Tomlin’s website is:
<http://christomlin.com/home>

It’s a Beautiful Day

One youtube video put to use in a recent morning service was by Jamie Grace, “It’s a beautiful day”. (To watch and listen, click: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPy0ctqMwEO>)

Jamie Grace is a Christian singer, composer, rapper from Atlanta. She won the 2012 Dove Award for new artist of the year. Her website is: <http://jamiegrace.com/>

And just one more. ...

During Advent Clive and Mary Pearson attended a number of services at Knox

Church in Dunedin. The church has a superb choir: it’s Christmas Eve midnight service attracts a full church – which is well over 800 people. One of the highlights of these Advent services was this youtube clip which features some lego and the combined efforts of father and son, Sam and Malcolm Gordon. (Click below)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVoGcumJwng>

Redevelopment of Parramatta and Westmead

Our Church has been blessed with magnificent sites in the heart of Parramatta and Westmead that faithfully serve the community providing physical, emotional and spiritual support to the marginalised, vulnerable and those in crisis.

The buildings on each of these sites are ageing and in need of renewal. The redevelopment of these campuses will financially and operationally position Parramatta Mission as part of the Uniting Church to respond to human need and live out the Gospel in faith, hope and love.

Parramatta

The Parramatta site is to be redeveloped as part of the Parramatta Square development which is a \$2billion civic redevelopment programme being led by Parramatta Council. The Church land is in the centre of the development and will be located adjacent to new library, civic and community facilities.

The Church development will encompass offices, congregation meeting and

fellowship space, communal meeting areas, serviced apartments and areas for the delivery of services to the homeless, vulnerable and needy in the community. The development will be funded by the sale of residential apartments to be constructed on the current Fellowship centre site. An iconic residential tower will activate the Church precinct and Parramatta Square.

In 2016 a planning proposal will be lodged with Parramatta Council seeking planning approval for the development. At this stage construction is scheduled to commence in about 2 – 3 years.

Westmead

The Westmead congregation of Parramatta Mission faithfully extend the hospitality of Jesus Christ through services and activities on campus seven days per week. Wesley Lodge Motel is a 59 room 3.5 star motel located on site with the chapel and meeting rooms. Wesley lodge is a vital ministry and activity of Parramatta Mission.

The vision for the development of this site is to construct a new 100 bed motel, conference centre, church, meeting rooms, café / restaurant, child care centre and other community space which will be funded by the sale of residential apartments also to be built on site. It is hoped that affordable and social housing will also be incorporated into the development.

A planning proposal is also being prepared for this site which will be lodged with Parramatta Council later in 2016. Development of this campus is not anticipated to occur within 4-5 years

These exciting developments will position the Uniting Church at the social and spiritual heart of two rapidly expanding centres in Western Sydney.

Ian Gray

Reflections on an Introductory Course in Pastoral Care for Muslims

“Pastoral Care” is a useful term for those of us who come from a Christian background. It has become shorthand for a concept that covers many different aspects and requires particular skills if it is to be offered in ways that do indeed offer caring. For those who come from a different faith tradition and from a non-Western background, there is no immediately comparable term. So for the 13 people who signed up for an introductory course in pastoral care, there was clearly a sense of not-knowing what they were going to be involved in, even though they had been given a brief outline. They came because they knew they needed this if they were to be authorized to visit people in hospitals, aged care facilities etc.

It doesn't matter that you may have been told that this was about encouraging personal reflection more than, or as least as much as being given factual input. They were used to being taught in a lecturing format. So, the first day, I arrived to find a partition down the room screening off the 3 men from the 10 women. This is the way their customary way. In another situation I might have said that this would not work so well for the purposes of the group and had to make an on-the-spot decision about whether to do this. Since we were all finding our way together, I left it. So, I could see both the men and the women and they could hear each other behind the

screen. They had also assumed that I would stand behind a lectern and use a microphone. I did not do either of those things. I did have to keep reminding myself to look at both groups. Making eye contact with the women was easier than with the men.

So on that first day, having begun to explain what pastoral care was, and established that in the Koran there are references to God being like a shepherd, we began by telling stories about our grandmothers, at first in twos and threes and then in the whole group. This was like a long ice-breaker. My assumptions were immediately challenged as it was one of the men who spoke very personally about his story. Indeed, throughout the course, two of the men were as ready as many of the women to share things from their own experience. The third young man already had the title of "sheikh", being engaged in study as the focus for his life. It felt like a breakthrough when after two weeks he made eye contact and then smiled and later even laughed. When I arrived to take the class on the second day, the partition had been removed and the men sat at their table in the same space as the women.

For many of these people I was probably the first Christian with whom they had engaged in depth. An important part of the experience was breaking down barriers and discovering a great deal of commonality.

That said, it also became clear as we went along and became involved in learning about such basic topics as listening skills, that some of what was being suggested to them actually challenged cultural behaviours. Arabs, they told me, are used

to going into situations where they might be visiting someone they didn't know and asking a lot of questions. This is what was expected. The idea of a visit not primarily being about such an exchange of information but about listening in order to hear what was going on, to understand a person's struggles and, indeed, what they might not be saying, was a very big thing. It was a big thing because they realised that it made sense, that it was right. Role plays revealed how hard it was for them to know what to do if they were not just asking questions. In many of the role plays I ended up modelling a different way for them, seeking to identify what feelings a person might be experiencing. This process was greatly helped by one of the women on whose initiative the course had been set up. She had lost a child who had had been ill for many months in the Children's Hospital before he died. She knew, from her own experience what was helpful and what was not.

From this ongoing learning everything else stemmed. It was clear from all the verbatims they wrote and from their conversations, that their faith informs everything they do. They have an immensely strong feeling of sisterhood and brotherhood, not least because of the difficulties for them as Muslims in the communities in which they live. They go out of their way to offer caring and support to friends, neighbours and strangers in ways that are very different from our Christian or secular society. They had to become comfortable with understanding that resorting too quickly to statements of faith that Allah would act was not always enough. Some wanted to give advice more than to listen. But they were all very keen to learn, to open up

about what they struggled with and what they found transformative.

A day spent visiting a Children's Hospital and a General Hospital, being guided by the chaplains, including the Muslim chaplain, made them appreciate what these chaplains do and also how much need there is for Muslim pastoral care volunteers. It confirmed for them what they had been learning in the classes and gave a context to what was still to come. That included sessions on loss and grief which again revealed different cultural perspectives and also opened up personal stories.

Another discussion of great significance arose from a reading they had done for homework about fear. As it happened, this was in the week of the Paris terrorist attacks. Many of them began to tell stories about what it was like for them at that present time, and what it had long been like. It seems that, for many of them confronting their fear, learning the acronym in which FEAR means Face it, Explore it, Accept it and Respond to it, was a very important tool for many areas of their life and in looking to the future going into hospitals as pastoral carers. It also informed a later discussion about boundaries and looking after themselves in ways that had particular application.

They were very positive about so much that was transformative learning. Many said the experience was life changing. Tears were shed and shared along the way. There was much laughter and teasing by everyone, including me, and between men and women. They know that this was just a beginning and it is heartening that many want to go on and continue what they have started. It clarified what worked

and what didn't work so well; what could be expanded and what needed more time. It emphasized the importance of building trusting and respectful relations, not making assumptions – even if one thought one was not! – and being prepared to be flexible.

This was a group that asked many questions and would persist until they had understood and, as such, was a joy to teach and to share with on a journey of mutual learning.



Front Row: The women who graduated along with Rev. Mary Pearson, Pastoral Educator for the program.

Back Row: includes 2 more of the women, 3 men who graduated, chaplains from Westmead Hospital, Rev. Ramsay Nutall from CCAC, Fr. Patrick McNerney from Broken Bay Institute, and Eveline Crotty from the Urban Ministry Movement - Sydney

<http://www.unitingworld.org.au/category/climate-change/>

Coming Soon:

Faith and Dementia

The Future Directions Working Group has supported the idea of a public lecture / seminar on Faith and Dementia. We

believe it will happen on site at Leigh Memorial on the evening of Wednesday 20 April. Arrangements are still in progress.

The church library, in the meantime, has purchased 3 recently published books on faith, dementia and Alzheimers Disease.

On faith and dementia, see:

<http://revjameshowell.blogspot.com.au/2014/01/dementia-god-christian-faith.html>

<http://dementia.stir.ac.uk/communities/dementia-friendly/faith-and-spirituality>

http://www.faithandfamily.org.uk/pdf/spiritual_care_of_dementia.pdf

For Christ's Sake,

Let Them Stay

Our noticeboard in Macquarie Street currently reads, 'For Christ's Sake, Let Them Stay'. The 'them' here is, of course, the children (and their families) who will be returned to Nauru following the recent High Court decision. That reference to "for Christ's sake" is important. It is signalling that those members of the church who are making a stand here are doing so because of their faith and how they understand the call to be a disciple.

The President of the Church, Stuart McMillan, has issued a pastoral statement.

Here is an extract from the statement.

We have been calling for the closure of the detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru for many years. The centres are breeding grounds for abuse and despair and damage people's health. Those who are here in Australia have come mostly for medical attention. Doctors and

psychiatrists have been warning the Government that return to Nauru will cause them immense harm.



Uniting Church members have joined other Christians, our friends from other faiths, and concerned Australians from around the country to call on the Prime Minister to "let them stay". Doctors, lawyers, artists, writers, teachers, unions, comedians and more are raising their voices too.

For everyone who's prayed, petitioned, or raised the Uniting Church banner at Let Them Stay rallies, thank you for your powerful Christian witness.

To read President McMillan's full statement.

https://www.victas.uca.org.au/newsmedia/Documents/Providing_sanctuary_Pastoral_Statement.pdf

Have you noticed?

This year we are travelling in the company of Luke's gospel. Each gospel differs in some ways from the others. One of the features of Luke (and the book of Acts which he also wrote) is the prominence he gives to women. It is a recurring theme.