
WITNESS



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Salutations and greetings to you all! I pray that wherever you are reading this, that you are warm! The bulbs in my garden suggest that Spring is on its way, but the weather is seemingly doing its best to hold onto winter for a little while longer.

The National Conference, of Lay Preachers was held on the 7th-10th of July. While the number of delegates was a little disappointing, the presentations were lively and enlightening, the fellowship was strong and the Melbourne weather was extremely accommodating.

In the last month of the lectionary, we have been exploring the parables of Matthew. I have always found the parables to be multi-faceted. The more I focus on one aspect of the story, the more I see the depth, and meanings held within the entire picture. The parables are deceptively simple in their construction- a narrative based on very common life scenarios of the time- farming, planting, making bread, and finding items of value. All familiar concepts to the listeners of the time. Their message was intentional, for Christ introduces them with the words "The Kingdom of heaven is like.."

The parables offer us a variety of perspectives to consider. We tend to focus on where 'we fit' in each of the scenarios. Are we part of the "wheat" or the "weeds", or "what type of soil are we?" However this year, I noticed that within these parables, there is an underlying theme, of the abundant generosity of the sower/farmer. We note that the farmer (God) is willing to sow seed, even in places that it is not expected to yield any harvest. Nor is he willing to remove the weeds until the harvest time, to ensure that only the 'right plants' are taken.

So we as lay preachers, often sow our seeds (our message) in places that are 'unfamiliar'. On unknown ears, and diverse communities. We do so, as lovingly and supportively as possible, with the understanding that some of our seeds, may take root and grow productively, even in some unexpected places.

The ministry of Lay Preacher is a continually evolving ministry within our Church, and even within our congregations. We acknowledge throughout our presbytery reporting lines, that there is an increasing need within many of our communities for Lay Preachers to provide support and worship guidance.

Each one of us is supported by our membership within the association, by the Committee of Management, by our congregations, and by the Uniting church, through our recognition.

The parables speak to us wherever we are in our lives. They encourage us to look deeply within ourselves for God's message, and to recognise that God is abundantly merciful, generous and patient. We are indeed, abundantly blessed.

Mandy Stark

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

Greetings to all of you hardworking and faithful Lay Preachers from the land of the true Vikings. I have been blessed with being able to worship these past two Sundays in the central church in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, and the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway. The first is a small, wooden church from the late 1800s, located in the country's capital, the second the massive stone cathedral dating back to the days when Olav Harraldson brought

Christianity to these parts in around 1000 CE. In total, one sentence was spoken in English, yet with my limited Norwegian (and non-existent Faroese) the message of hope, comfort and the immense generosity of our God was received. Liturgies, very close to UIW, were followed and the sense of unity of the church worldwide was strongly felt. As worshippers we don't need to understand every word or nuance. The spirit of the worship, and those with whom we are sharing in our time with God, brings us into unity and our worship is a gift to God. I encourage all of you to worship wherever you are when travelling, despite what language and cultural differences there may be. We are called to worship and thus we must.

Since I last wrote the energies of the COM were strongly focussed on the National Conference. The energy was well spent, as the Conference was a wonderful time of learning, expanding our understandings and developing and strengthening friendships with Lay Preachers across the country. Thanks go to Joan McRae especially, for her organisation and motivation of the rest of us to get the work done and make it happen.

WWCCs continue to keep our attention. The work of the Presbytery representatives has been excellent and there have only been a few situations where currently serving Lay Preachers have been less than willing to have the checks done. This has required firmness as well as gentle care. In some instances the issue has had a positive result in the Lay Preacher assessing their current level of contribution. The latest version of 'Keeping Children Safe' came out early in July and it is important that we be aware of any changes to UCA Victoria and Tasmania policy. The Committee of Management is working on updating all of our documents to reflect these changes to policies. We try very hard to keep forms and other such documents up to date.

It still is a concern of mine that there are so many unknowns about how the Assembly requirements for Lay Preacher training and

recognition and the competencies which require assessment. Rohan continues to keep us informed and I'm grateful for all the work he does to keep us in the picture. Despite the unknowns, there still are many opportunities around the Synod for continuing education. North East Victoria recently co-hosted Wisdom's Feast with the CTM, two days, a weekend of excellent learning opportunities for Lay Preachers. Other Presbyteries have events happening as well. I encourage everyone to take the opportunities provided to enhance knowledge and skill. Come next AGM we'd love to have a long list of Continuing Education certificates to present.

As the implementation of the MSR rolls on within the Synod, just where we'll end up may be open to question. Despite the ever present unknowns, we have a strong role to play in ensuring that worship is maintained and supported in the small and not so small communities across the Synod. May you be blessed in your faith and service.

God's peace to you all. **Lou Anne Stabb**

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Gippsland

Peter Morris

Discussions at the National Conference of Lay Preachers were a reminder that many Presbyteries experience the same joys and challenges as the Presbytery of Gippsland.

With dedicated clergy, Lay Preachers, worship leaders and worship committees doing as much as we can, we struggle to provide preachers for all congregations on any given Sunday. While we would like to be able to do more, we need to be content with doing what we can.

It is a great encouragement to see worship leaders growing in ability and some beginning their training for the accountable ministry of Lay Preacher.

We have good opportunities for continuing education; but with the distances to travel and being so busy; many find it difficult to

attend these sessions. The best ways to arrange pastoral encouragement and continuing education for our lay preachers has become an issue. With many strategic changes in the life of the church, it is more important than ever that we take an interest and encourage each other. A vital part of our care for each other could be a phone call, a chat, and to know that we are praying for each other's ministry.

In all this the LORD is with us and delights in our sincere worship

We have much to be thankful for.

North East Victoria **Joan McRae**

Unfortunately only three of our Lay Preachers were able to attend the National Conference..

Wisdom's Feast - Crossing Borders, was co-hosted by the Presbytery of North East Victoria and the Centre for Theology and Ministry at Yarrowonga on August 18 and 19 offered a wonderful opportunity for Lay Preachers to enjoy engaging with staff from the CTM as well as local presenters. Sean Winter, lecturer in New Testament Studies, presented the Friday evening Keynote, *Jesus the Transgressor*. The Saturday programme included further keynotes, workshops and plenary sessions.

Port Phillip East **Di Paterson**

There are a number of Lay Preachers in our Presbytery who are involved regularly in taking services to support Churches who are unable to afford full time ministry. Two of our Lay Preachers presented to Presbytery to be endorsed to go forward to candidate as Ministers of the Word, and will both be going to the Selection Conference. I have contacted Presbytery PRC with regard to a candidate who has fulfilled all of the criteria for being accredited and am yet to hear back from them.

Port Philip West **Rob Coulson**

All accredited Lay Preachers in PPW have provided WWCC details.

Two Lay Preachers have retired recently (Darryl Palmer and Beth Allen) we wish them well in their retirement and thank them for their contribution to the Church in their ministry as Lay Preachers.

Tasmania **Heather Cowled**

We celebrated the commissioning of Karen Woolford at the Wesley Hobart congregation on the 20th of August . We warmly welcome her to our membership.

Yarra Yarra **Haley Rose**

Approximately 10 lay preachers from Yarra Yarra attended the National conference in July at CTM. All enjoyed the conference and found the speakers interesting. It was a weekend of food for the soul and wonderful fellowship. Our congratulations and thanks to the organisers of the weekend.

We are continuing the process of updating our roll of Lay Preachers. We have now had responses from almost 60 Lay Preachers with 14 Lay Preachers indicating retirement/resignation and locating a few that we did not know about. We have had a poor response rate from our congregations and are following these up to ensure consistency of information including WWCC details.

We have a number of candidates for lay ministry who are at different stages of their study and accreditation with each being offered a mentor through this journey. We were pleased to endorse James Tang for lay ministry and a commissioning service will occur in the near future. The Committee also accepted Maiava Alenasa as a candidate for ministry.

Our next continuing education session will be in October with LouAnne coming to present and chair our Annual meeting.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LAY PREACHERS

The National Conference of Lay Preachers was hosted for the National Committee of Lay Preachers by the Lay Preachers' Association Synod of Victoria and Tasmania at the Centre for Theology and Ministry, Parkville, July 7 to 10, 2017.

Attendance was lower than we had hoped, with only just over 40 attending. We were delighted to welcome two from Thursday Island, two from Brisbane and five from South Australia, but were disappointed there were no participants from New South Wales/ACT or Western Australia.

The programme included welcome and closing sessions, worship, keynote presentations, workshops, the National Meeting and free time.

Keynote presentations

Rethinking Christian Faith in the Light of Ancient Semantics Dr Sunny Chen

The Wedding Imagery in the Gospel of John Dr Sunny Chen

Recovering the World of Jesus the Jew and the Quest for the Historical Jesus

Dr Paul Forgasz

Faith and Brain Matters

Dr Jenny Byrnes

Workshops

The Art of Prayer through Art

Dr Peter Blackwood

The Art of Public Prayer

Rev Rod Horsfield

Re:Generation Chris Barnett

Messy Church Chris Barnett

Singing the Psalms Colin Jenkins

Singing New Hymns LouAnne Stabb

Evenings

Reformation 500 -and Us

Pr Gordon Wegener, the Very Revd Denis Stanley EV, Dr D'Arcy Wood (Joan)

A Little Magic Rev Chris Meneilly

The Church of the Latter-Day Geeks Dr Avril Hannah-Jones

All presentations were very warmly received. People from other Synods were delighted by the depth, variety and excellence of all sessions.

Sage and Grace provided their superb catering. CTM Resources provided a bookstall. It was managed by Robert Lees, to whom great appreciation is shown. We had expected to meet numerous participants at Tullamarine or Southern Cross, and Bruce Hill was our transport co-ordinator. In the event, with fewer interstate members, Bruce did most of this work himself.

Transport Bruce Hill had offered assistance and was asked to work with a team to meet arrivals. In the event, there were only eleven interstate arrivals, so Bruce met them himself. Warmest thanks is due to Bruce.

Funds Management graciously offered to give conference bags, lanyards and stationery. We were very grateful for the sponsorship given.

We did not provide evaluations forms at the conference, and may even now seek some responses.

The conference budget was based on an attendance of 60, in line with previous National Conferences. With the smaller numbers there will be a deficit, not yet known. The National Lay Preachers' Committee has a conference fund which will cover this.

Maureen Postma was our Registrar. She separately invoiced each participant according to attendance and accommodation needs. Warmest thanks, Maureen.

We are extremely grateful to the Centre for Theology and Ministry for use of the venue, and for allowing Merryn Gray to receive payment of invoices.

I offer personal thanks to the rest of the planning group - LouAnne Stabb, Maureen Postma, Alastair Davison, Lyn Bromage and Rob Coulson and to Rob Lees, for his work as treasurer. **Joan McRae - Convenor**

The Genesis of Lay Preaching -

To understand Lay Preaching in the Uniting Church, we must first turn our minds back to the early days of Methodism in Southern England in the years before 1740. John and Charles Wesley were brothers and both Anglican Ministers. Both had studied at Oxford University where they had formed a regular prayer group amongst some of the students. The group developed a systematic bible study method taking to heart many of the somewhat radical ideas of personal salvation promoted by different church leaders of the period. The writings of the German monk/Theologian, Martin Luther, and the faith of Moravian exiles from Central Europe were strong influences on the brothers. Another student in this 'Holy Club' was George Whitefield. George was an inspiring preacher but whose methods and message was resented by the established church leadership of the time. George became a preacher at open air gatherings when the churches were closed to him. John also participated in this form of out- reach when churches did not welcome common folk.

It was John Wesley who saw the importance of drawing those who responded to their open- air preaching into groups for mutual support and encouragement, just as they had done during their student days. These classes were led by trained Lay Leaders. Classes were formed into local societies for public worship, which was always addressed by a clergyman. This work was definitely under the leadership of the Anglican Church. This new movement spread rapidly through the working class and industrial communities of England and Wales. Growth however was not smooth sailing. Basil Miller's book on the life of John Wesley records that several of these Lay Leaders began to take up the added role as preachers, as clergymen were not always available.

"In early 1740 word came to Wesley at Bristol that Thomas Maxwell a Lay Leader in a London Class had presumed to preach to the Foundry Society of London. This alarmed Wesley so he rushed back to London where he sought to deal with this troublesome fellow. His mother, Susannah, met him, saying, "John, take heed what you do with reference to this young man, for he is as surely called to preach as you are." Heeding his mother's words, Wesley attended a service where Maxwell was the speaker. He listened quietly to the message and said: "It is the Lord's doing; let him do what seems good. What am I that I should withstand God?"

Convinced that Maxwell was God's anointed minister, Wesley encouraged him by sanctioning his work as a lay preacher. This was the beginning of the remarkable rise of lay workers in Wesley's societies. Before the year was out there were twenty such preachers heralding the doctrines they had learned from John. Among the outstanding ones was John Nelson, a stonecutter who had been converted under Wesley's ministry.

Once converted, Nelson said, "If it be my Master's will, I am ready to go to hell and preach to the devils." It enraged the clergy of the Established Churches to see a stonecutter preaching the gospel, and doing it better than they with all their boasted training. During one of Nelson's sermons he was set upon by bullies and all most beaten to death. Such was the persecutions which Wesley's lay workers faced to preach the Gospel"

Lay Preaching in the Uniting Church is a recognised form of ministry. It is a role that recognises gifts and maturity in an individual made available to the Church for the important tasks of encouragement, mentoring and on occasions, leading public worship. It includes the tasks of reflecting, explaining and applying the scriptures.

The Basis of Union records, "She (the Uniting Church) will seek to recognise those endowed with the gift of the Spirit for this task, will provide for their training and will gladly wait upon that fuller understanding of the obedience the Christian man (or woman)

which shall flow from their ministry. Such members will be called Lay Preachers.”

Robert Lees President Loddon Mallee Lay Preachers Association

Life Lessons-

I came across these ‘life lessons’ recently, and have found them quite profound in their simplicity. While I have not been successful in determining their original source, I think the message is very powerful. The story of the ark reminds us that our Lord asks ordinary people, with ordinary skills and experiences, to do extraordinary things. Equally, that God is gracious, and gives us hope, even when we cannot see it for ourselves.

So I hope you also find these lessons insightful, and perhaps inspiring.

“Everything I need to learn from Life, I learned from Noah’s Ark.”

1. Don’t miss the boat, and remember that we are all in the same boat.
2. Plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the Ark.
3. Stay fit. When you are 600 years old, God might just ask you to do something big.
4. Don't listen to critics; just get on with what needs to be done.
5. Build your future on high ground. This may not be ground that you are familiar with.
6. For safety’s sake, travel in pairs.
7. Speed isn’t always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
8. When you’re stressed, float a while.
9. Remember, the Ark was made by amateurs, the Titanic was built by professionals.
10. No matter how bad the storms, how big the waves are, when you are with God, there is always a rainbow waiting.

LAY PREACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

President	Ms LouAnne Stabb 3 Chifley Street, Wodonga 3690 02.6059 2244 stabb@inet.net.au
Secretary	Mrs Heather Cowled 03 62720396 hlcowled@bigpond.com
Treasurer	Mr Rob Lees 28 Towers st, Bendigo 3550 54412967 robertlees@alliance3550.com
Witness Editor	Mrs Mandy Stark 5 Nioka Crt Park Orchards 3114 amandajanestark@gmail.com