
WITNESS



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Salutations and greetings to you all! The lectionary over the last few months has provided us with the opportunity to explore the wonder and awe of Christ's miracles. Through the gospel writings of Mark and John, we have listened to numerous healings of afflictions both physical and psychological, mastery over the elements of wind and water, resurrection and the feeding of the multitudes from the most meagre of offerings, five loaves and two fish.

On the recent Education Day, Wendie Wilkie encouraged us to begin our biblical exploration and exegesis with the words "I wonder." These are words that open our eyes and our minds to so many important details when we consider not only the miracles themselves, but the responses and reactions of those who were witnesses to these wonders. In the last few weeks, I have found myself reflecting on the crowd who were provided with this very simple, yet seemingly miraculous meal on the hill. "I wonder what they talked about as they ate?" As the bread and fish were passed around the crowd, each person eating their fill, what was the conversation that was shared amongst the recipients? Were they amazed by this experience, or were they content to listen to the lessons that Christ was offering? Were they looking around the sizable crowd, wondering why so many had gathered to listen to this man who seemed to speak in riddles, and dared to confront the leadership of the temple and talk about being in relationship with God without the involvement of the temple hierarchy. No doubt that many followers found these messages difficult to hear, and indeed as John indicates, many walked away.

As we consider our own modern lives, our personal experiences and daily challenges, do we sometimes miss the "Miracles" before us? Do we get caught up in eating the bread, or caring for the sick friend, or tending to our daily chores, and potentially overlook Christ's work that is, in fact staring us in the face? As we approach preaching the gospel, we are called to explore the context, to open ourselves to the intention and presence of the Word, and to impart it with theological and relevant interpretation. Perhaps we can add to these requirements, the need to "Wonder". To be more present, more aware of the grace, the blessings, and the everyday miracles that happen around us.

Go gently, and be Blessed. **Mandy Stark**

THE PRESIDENT WRITES

It was excellent to see so many of you in attendance at the recent Lay Education Day. You can read about the presentations elsewhere in this edition of Witness. Just prior to the day we were quite excited about the possibility of the day's offerings being live streamed. Links were made available, the equipment set up and all, we thought, was in reasonable readiness. However, as it was very much a first attempt, it didn't work as we'd hoped. We're sorry for any frustration that we may have brought to those of you who sat down and attempted to be part of the conference from afar. We certainly will keep trying, and hopefully future education opportunities will be successfully live streamed and recordings available on-line so those unable to be in-person at an event may join in via the technology. We'll get there, of that I am confident. Despite the frustrations of the day, it was a time which had benefit to Lay Preachers and other worship leaders who made the trip to Parkville. Thank you so

much for your attendance. Thanks, too, to all those on the Committee of Management who were busy all day attending to the many jobs that go into making an education event happen.

The sun has just begun to shine which is the first after many days of dreary cold and very little serious rain up here in Victoria's northeast. Those daffodil buds I see in the garden outside the window will fully open in the next day or so, pointing the way to spring which is soon upon us. These signs of new life around the corner fill me with hope and excitement. We can become a bit jaded and tired towards the end of a time of being wrapped up against the cold and drizzle, not just physically, but also in our hearts. Spring, for me, ushers in a time of openness to others and the gifts of joy that lives filled with more socialising and sharing brings. God comes to us, drawing us into his love through the wonder of creation and our relationships with each other and the wider world. We must not forget, though, that here in the south we are not experiencing the drought to the extent of many other places in the country. In many places spring may bring more concern and pain as weather is not supporting the growth that is desperately needed for food production that our country depends on. May the joy that comes with the bursting forth of God's love in spring here for us, be shared as a message of hope and a commitment to walk alongside those for whom spring brings uncertainty and loss. May our worship leadership bring joy and love this spring to all people, whatever spring means to them in their place. God's love is abundant and more than enough for all.

God's peace **Lou Anne Stabb**

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Gippsland

Peter Morris

The active lay preachers of Gippsland usually say much the same thing when they gather together. They are glad of their calling and doing about as much as they can. Their ministry is greatly appreciated, alongside the clergy,

worship leaders and members of congregations who lead worship across Gippsland.

As we think of the people who have encouraged us along the way, it is important to be praying for each other and encouraging each other whenever we catch up. I would encourage everyone to work on our communication, hearing each other preach when we can, sharing our sermon notes with our minister or other preachers, and passing on the good reports we hear about each other.

I would encourage our lay preachers to write an annual report for their Church Council. As part of being accountable, I would also encourage our lay preachers to keep track of the training days they attend, the helpful books they read and CDs they listen to, and apply for their Continuing Education Certificate.

It was good to see a number of lay preachers and trainees at our recent training day on the Basis of Union with Geoff Thompson and good to see a number of lay preachers involved in Presbytery.

We are planning for the November meeting of Presbytery to be a special time of recognising the service of our lay preachers.

We have much to be thankful for...

North East Victoria

Joan McRae

It was a great joy for our Lay Preachers when Helen Pettifer of Mansfield was Recognised by the Presbytery of North East Victoria at its meeting on May 17, 2018. Helen was commissioned at Mansfield on July 29 at a service led by the Resource Minister for the Alpine Regional Resource Ministry. We have congratulated Helen and pray that she will be richly blessed in this new ministry.

We rejoice, too, in welcoming Robert Lees to our Presbytery. Michele was inducted as minister to Echuca-Moama on July 7, so Robert is now living in the Presbytery of North East Victoria. We pray for Michele and Robert in their new ministries with us.

Our Lay Preachers and many other folk have been sharing in ReGen and Safe Church training sessions as well as others run by our Presbytery Minister Mission and Education in various churches.

Port Phillip East Di Paterson

Recently, I was delighted to provide paperwork for a new person who is keen to commence study as a Lay Preacher and to explore where that journey leads. We have many of our Lay Preachers regularly involved in leading worship at a number of Churches in the Presbytery. A few of our Lay Preachers are involved in providing supply to some of our Churches.

Our Presbytery is in the throes of working towards “Cultivating a New Future”, to look at the most effective staffing model in view of the changes to funding for the Presbyteries. We have worked through stage one and are working through stage 2 and moving forward towards the final stages. This is an exciting time as we look to the future of the Uniting Church in our Presbytery and also in Victoria and Tasmania.

Port Philip West- no report Tasmania – vacant

Western Victoria – Daryl Pedler

While this seems to have been a relatively busy three months; however, as some of the tasks were for my ‘orientation’ to the role, it may have just felt ‘busy’. Horsham UCA is in conversation with CTM about developing an educational, video-linked hub of CTM in Horsham. The concept has been approved by the Standing Committee of Presbytery; I have also indicated ‘in principle’ support and offered to attend an early session to help build linkages within the Presbytery.

I have found the PRC very supportive of Lay Preachers and interested in becoming more supportive (e.g. see below). Further, the Presbytery is also looking at ways of acknowledging Lay Preachers and their contribution to the life of the church. Sadly, the presbytery contact list of LPs is significantly out-of-date. I presented the issue to the June meeting of PRC and they agreed to my request for them to send a letter (which I had already drafted) to all Church Councils within the presbytery seeking up-to-date contact details of LPs

and candidates within their congregations. As contact with some Church Councils had indicated considerable confusion at a local level between the Lay Preachers, Lay Presiders and Worship Leaders, details of all three groupings were requested. Responses are slowly ‘trickling in’! Having spent a number of years away from Warrnambool (during which time the presbytery boundaries also changed), I am planning visits to meet with LPs in each of the sub-regions within the presbytery. However, I do not intend to start these visits until the LP contact list is closer to being up-to-date.

Loddon Mallee- Robert Lees

Survey forms have recently been returned from more than half of our members showing details of their service leadership during 2017. Results confirm that Lay Preachers fulfil a vital role in small congregations where ordained ministry is unavailable. Several of our members conduct services on average more than twice a month. The hours contributed providing worship leadership is most significant, and is usually in addition to holding other roles within their Church. Like motherhood, Lay Preaching it is a sacrificial role which brings rich spiritual rewards, unseen by those occupying the pews.

Loddon Campaspe can confirm that all Lay Preachers hold current Working With Children Registration

Yarra Yarra

Haley Rose

The lay preachers in Yarra Yarra continue to be busy taking services with a number of lay preachers also taking services as part of the travelling lay Preacher program. We also have a number of lay preacher candidates that in the process of undertaking assessed services keeping everyone very busy. Our next in-service day is in October with Reverend Sean Winters as speaker. We are in the process of updating our roll again (as if there has been an end and a beginning) and arranging a number of acknowledgement

of service certificates and presentations for a number of our long serving lay preachers. We are blessed to have such a dedicated group of lay preachers with a number of them making me feel exhausted just from hearing how many services they take a month.

Lay Preachers Education Day- 4th of August, 2018 .

A gathering of approximately 50 lay preachers gathered at CTM for our second Education Day for the year. The presentations were inspiring and thought provoking,

Review of Session 1- Alistair Davidson

Session 1, presented by Rev Dr Sean Winter was entitled "Making Use of Commentaries". When we sit down to prepare for a sermon, and stare at the blank sheet, to what do we turn? Sean warned of the dangers of using someone else's work (e.g Textweek), or turning to previous interpretations or regurgitation of our old sermons. He reminded us that some congregations have 'long memories' when it comes to past sermons' preached! In stressing that, we must always be engaged in biblical preaching (What does the text say?) Sean reviewed the importance of commentaries, highlighting that the more recent the date of publication the better. Equally the more detailed the scriptural interpretation, the more useful it tends to be, however bigger does not always equate to better! Frequently the level of detail provided in the commentaries will open up ideas for a sermon, show us things we have not seen and offer a range of interpretations. Sean emphasised the pivotal points of a sermon preparation- Focus, Function and Form.

Review of Session 2 – Robert Lees

Wendie Wilkie encouraged us to be diligent in our pursuit of understanding the message of the scriptures and to recognise that the people of the bible, were very

much like us. They were faithful and fearful, wise and ill-tempered, distracted and uneducated. They faced hardship, uncertainty and the challenges of day to day living.

We were encouraged to ask questions of people we meet in the bible stories, beginning with the phrase "I wonder.." I wonder what they felt? I wonder where they were? I wonder what they did next? I wonder who else was involved? I wonder if being faithful was difficult?

Through such questions we might begin to discover afresh how the gospel message might be lived through us. For God is still at work in the world, sometimes in suprising events.

During the session we were specifically asked to apply this technique to the story of Elizabeth and Mary, contained within Luke 1:39-56. This discussion brought about many new perspectives on the experiences of these women, and how these could be used in a worship context. Wendie also offered us the writing of Katie Baker , from her book Hay and Stardust. The article is called "I am Mary" (I have included it on the last page of this copy of Witness) This simple yet poignant offering is a timely reminder of how we hold our own perceptions of biblical characters far beyond their scriptural integrity.

In Review of Session 3- Bruce Hill

During the third session for the day, the Rev Ian Ferguson, Minister of the Word at Brunswick Uniting Church, presented Session 3 of the LPA Education Day on the topic 'Worshipping in the Body - exploring communal aspects of worship as the Body of Christ, and the ways our own bodies are engaged and involved in worship'.

The session started with an exercise where we focussed on our breathing and feeling our bodies moving as we breathed. Being alive means being moved. We then shared our experiences and it was suggested that we could begin worship in this way.

We were encouraged to give attention to the way we speak and move in our roles as worship leaders in order to help the congregation to be brought closer to God.

Two comedy video clips were shown, "Tim Hawkins on hand raising", and "Mr. Bean in church" (You can Google these on YouTube and watch them) that were both very funny but both made a point about different ways of using our bodies in worship.

Each church has different rituals. Our role is to help worship happen, being invitational.

Why should we focus on our body in worship? The Holy Spirit resides in the body. When the body is active, so is the mind. Our faith is all about the body. The Word became flesh incarnate in Jesus Christ. We are a sacramental church. In baptism we wash the body with living water, and in communion we eat of the body of Christ and drink of the blood of Christ.

Having practised these, Ian prayed and we used these hand gestures while he prayed:

1. hands together pointing upwards in the traditional prayer posture "God be with us";
2. hands clasped with fingers interleaved making a plea "God move through us";
3. hands open and crossed against our chest in acknowledged reverence, "God speak in us"; then
4. hands open and raised in praise "God move around us".

Ian then spoke of the importance of preparation before commencing worship. A moment of prayer can be a moment of deep centring. "This is not about me. Send your Holy Spirit that your Word may be heard".

We then practised gesturing while blessing. When we raise our hands to pronounce the blessing, imagine your feet connected to the earth, moving the whole body from the centre of the earth, pushing upwards as we

raise our hands, which automatically causes us to breathe.

The session concluded with those present going forward to the baptismal font, remembering our baptism using our own meaningful gestures to do this.

There was a lot of positive feeling expressed by participants with many comments about the value of teaching in this area. As one who feels comfortable praising God with my body rather than just my voice, I felt that this session was both worthwhile and confirming.

Session 4 - Continuing Lay Preacher Education

This session was held across the wider group, and was an exploration of our current system of delivering and assessing Lay Preacher education, with the intention of determining positive changes for the future. Each table reviewed a series of questions, and a more detailed report will be prepared for the next copy of Witness.

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I am the Mary of your Christmas cards. I listen calmly while the angel

brings me news that will shake up my life beyond measure. I accept what has been ordained for me. I am young and dressed in blue.

I am the Mary of your Christmas card. Despite travelling almost 100 miles on a donkey across the desert and giving birth in a stable, I am still immaculately clean and tidy, cradling my infant son, unperturbed by my surroundings, I am still young and dressed in blue.

Do you have a picture of me 30 years on? Have I aged in your eyes?

Am I still calm and dressed in blue? Do you see me at the wedding feast, recognising deep within that his time was coming and he would soon be no longer mine?

How I aged in those three years. But am I still young in your picture? Was I not grey-haired as I stood at the foot of the cross? Do you know what it takes to watch your son being crucified? Do you have a picture of me – in tears, distraught? Or am I still the Mary of your Christmas cards young and dressed in blue?

You know the end – the triumph of his resurrection, the kingdom without end – and knowing this affects your picture of me. I am always young, dressed in blue, calm, serene, humble and willing – never allowed to show fear, hurt, anger, pain and grief.

For many, I remain the Mary of the Christmas cards. If I am called to be

blessed, please remember all I stand for. As you receive your cards this Christmas, please look at me and remember this is just the beginning.

- By Katie Baker, abridged version from Magnet magazine; unabridged version printed in Hay and Stardust, a Wild Goose Publication for the Iona Community.

