



Uniting Network Australia

c/- PO Box 98
Enmore NSW 2042

www.connect.to/unitingnetwork/

NSW/ACT - Uniting Network NSW/ACT

Links to the Uniting Church in Australia through the NSW Board of Education
PO Box 98 Enmore, NSW 2042 Ph: Warren Talbot on 0408 430 582
www.nsw.uca.org.au/boe/resources/unitingnetwork.htm
unnswhotmail.com

QLD - Contact Revd Beverly Cameron in Sydney (02) 9957 5367
Bev can refer individuals to people in QLD

SA - Unity and Friends of Unity

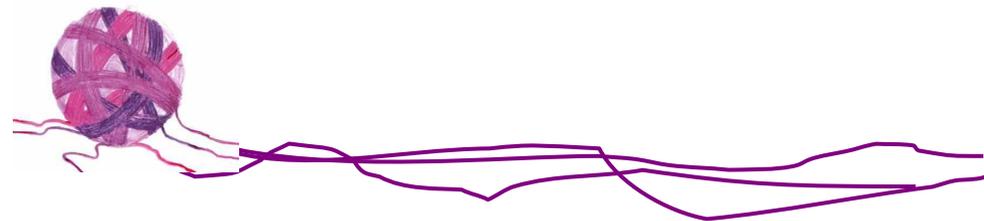
Unity is a support group for lgbt people, their families and friends.
Friends of Unity is an association of Uniting Church people who support Unity in SA and work for equality for lgbt people
PO Box 848, North Adelaide, SA 5006
www.fou.uniting.com.au/unity.html

TAS - at Penguin TAS
0416 176 349 Peter Weeks

VIC - "for84" supports diversity and inclusiveness
PO Box 2149 Ringwood North, VIC 3134
www.for84.unitingchurch.org.au
admin@for84.unitingchurch.com.au

WA - Uniting Network WA

C/O Trinity Church, 72 St Georges Terrace, Perth, 6000.
Phone 08 9321 9711 (ask for Bev)
www.connect.to/unitingnetwork/wa.html



uniting network review

faith | gender | sexuality | education

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Editor: Elizabeth Teece, Co-Convenor, Uniting Network NSW/ACT
Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW

Deputy Editor: Warren Talbot, Co-Convenor, Uniting Network NSW/ACT
Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW

Editorial Advisory Group: An Editorial Advisory Group is being established, and will be in place for the December 2006 edition.

Uniting Network Review is a quarterly publication of Uniting Network Australia, produced in December, March, June and September. Subscription is via membership of the Network. *UNR* is edited and produced by UN NSW/ACT, which, since 1992, has formally linked and reported to the wider Uniting Church through the NSW Synod Board of Education. *The Christian ministry of the Uniting Network NSW/ACT is education and adult faith development concerning gender identity, sexuality and related matters, expressing pastoral care and respect for the God-given dignity of all people. Membership of the Network is open to all.*

Contributions are welcome on any matter which might further the aims and objectives of the Network. The views expressed in *UNR* are not necessarily those of the Uniting Network or the Uniting Church, and should not be presented as such. Please direct all contributions and inquiries to the Deputy Editor, wrtalbot@gmail.com or send a hard copy to PO Box 98 Enmore NSW 2042. The deadline for the next issue is 1 November 2006. Where authorship is not stated, news, views and articles are written by the Deputy Editor. Copyright rests with each writer. Permission needs to be sought for any copying or reproduction. Approval for publication and re-printing rests with the Editor, Ms Teece.

Next issues and themes:

December 2006 (Advent) issue is “Our Holy Families”, which includes the many ways in which LGBTI Christians live in community.

February 2007 (Lent) edition is “Our histories - Reformed, Evangelical and LGBTI”.

Contributions on these themes, or other matters, are welcome, as are news items. Articles should be brief (maximum 700 words), though longer articles will be considered on the theme for a particular issue.

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From the Editors: "God's Word: God's World"

Readers will be aware that the theme for our first Editorial, as the new team for *UNR*, is the same as the theme for the Eleventh Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. It's a good theme - for our Uniting Church, our Uniting Network, and this publication. But, first, a bit of background. *UNR* commenced in 2001 as a publication of the Uniting Network NSW/ACT. In 2002 it was accepted as the national publication for the Uniting Network. In 2006, at the "daring gathering" held in Perth, it was decided that editorial responsibility for *UNR* be allocated to NSW/ACT, with Elizabeth Teece as the Editor. This is the first issue under the new arrangements. We are looking forward to a regular quarterly publication schedule. Some quarters it will be shorter or longer.

We would like to state what we think is the particular role of this publication. First, *UNR* is a major way in which the Uniting Network Australia communicates with members and supporters. Thus, this issue includes the statement from the Perth "daring gathering", and a brief introduction to our national co-convenors and the national team. Second, *UNR* is a good way to learn about the views of UN members concerning ongoing discussions in the Uniting Church. Third, we hope to provide some additional perspectives on the broad approach to matters of faith, education, gender and sexuality.

Following the Eleventh National Assembly (Brisbane, July 2006), we believe that one of the major issues facing LGBTI people, our friends, families and supporters in the Uniting Church, concerns what it means to be an integrated Church. Brisbane 2006 was not a "victory" in any conventional sense of that word. Rather, it was one more step on a journey to wholeness and integration that the Uniting Church has been making for nearly thirty years.

Finally, we could not be taking on the task of editing and producing *UNR* for the next two years without the support of a great team, namely the Committee of Uniting Network NSW/ACT. Thanks to Elizabeth Groves, Leanne Hutcheson, Elizabeth Moran and Jonathon Rea. We are all committed and involved in *UNR* as part of our service to the Network and our Uniting Church. We hope that we can respond with honesty, courage and integrity, to God's Word in God's World!

Elizabeth Teece, Editor; Warren Ross Talbot, Deputy Editor

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"Serving Christ"

Greetings from the Revd Gregor Henderson, National President of the Uniting Church in Australia

"I am pleased to offer a greeting to the members and friends of the Uniting Network through Uniting Network Review. I have been aware of and appreciated the Network's ministry with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people for some years, and see the Network as one part of the wider Church's mission and ministry.

We are all called to serve Christ crucified, with the gifts God has given to each of us. It is an important time with many challenges for us as disciples of Christ Jesus in Australia, reaching to the many who now have no contact with the Church. The need for peace, justice and reconciliation in the world seems to be all around us as I write. We can and should pray for the Church and the world which belongs to God.

I am more than confident that God is with us in the Uniting Church as we exercise our gifts for ministry, serving and witnessing to the Gospel of Christ Jesus our Saviour."

Daring to Celebrate Relationships

A statement from the Seventh Daring Gathering, 9 - 12 June 2006, Perth:

Daring 2006, with its theme of "Celebrating Relationships", took place in the context of a widespread community debate about the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. It also took place at a critical time in the life of the Uniting Church one month before the Eleventh Assembly which will consider the Church's position on the ministry of gay and lesbian people. In this context, we dare to make the following affirmations of our faith in God and our hopes for justice for all people regardless of their gender identity and sexuality.

1. We dare to believe in a God who delights in diversity, expressed in the colours of creation and all living beings, and in the many ways human beings relate to and love each other.

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2. We believe that human beings, irrespective of their particular sexuality and gender identity, can love and be loved in a life-enhancing manner.
3. We commit ourselves to hope for a world where all loving life-affirming and faithful relationships, regardless of people's gender identity and sexuality, are supported, valued and celebrated as reflections of God's love.
4. We draw strength from each other's courage and honesty, and the generosity of spirit and grace that characterises this openness.
5. We recognise and be empowered in our own experiences of courage.
6. We believe that the church can be a place where the diversity of God's creativity can be affirmed, celebrated and practiced.
7. We continue to challenge cultural homophobia and heterosexism, and commit to:
 - working with state and federal government processes to advocate for just policies, including the right of same-sex couples to have their relationships legally recognised with all the benefits and responsibilities that arise from such recognition;
 - working to create safe school environments;
 - supporting parents and friends;
 - encouraging academic and theological enquiry;
 - working together with people from other faith communities; and discovering and honouring the inherent spirituality of all human beings.



Daring 2006 a reflection by Andrew O

The Seventh National Gathering of the Uniting Network was held in Perth over the June long weekend this year. Although the location was beyond the reach of some people in SA and other States, it enabled a large number of West Australians to attend for the first time.

On Friday evening we were officially welcomed and shared opening worship. The theme of the Gathering was 'Daring to Celebrate Relationships'. On Saturday we had an interactive presentation on how to build positive relationships, a hypothetical panel discussion on same-sex marriage, and a presentation on the politics of same-sex marriage. That night we had a great meal at a restaurant, interspersed with dancing to live old rock and roll music.

The same-sex marriage debate was a good reminder that there is a place for those of us who don't quite fit into the traditional heterosexual mould.

On Sunday there was a focus on youth, with an excellent presentation on church outreach initiatives for same-sex attracted youth in regional WA, and an inspiring story of a young gay man coming out to his family and church. I also attended a thought-provoking workshop on liturgies to celebrate key events in our lives, and one which examined the representation of sexuality and religion in pop culture.

Monday saw the Uniting Network business session. We heard reports on what has happened in the Network over the last two years, and held the election of the executive committee for the next two years (including election of myself as Secretary). Following this was the closing worship (which I missed as I needed to catch my plane home).

I felt the Gathering had a very down-to-earth, community feel where we had plenty of opportunity to interact with each other. I felt very welcomed by everyone, and thought the Perth organising group did such a fantastic job to make the event run smoothly and provide a real safe space. It was also uplifting to renew old friendships and acquaintances, and make new ones. I was thankful for the dedication and talents of those who are working with glbt young people. And the discussions on the same-sex marriage debate were both interesting and hopeful for me. It was a good reminder that there is a place for those of us who don't quite fit into the traditional heterosexual mould, and that God is present in those spaces we make for ourselves.

Eleventh Assembly of the UCA decides on human sexuality

The 2006 Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) agreed to a proposal which confirms the role of presbyteries and congregations in making decisions concerning sexuality and leadership. The decision recognised the pain of gay and lesbian people in the Church, and confirms that individuals in same sex relationships can serve the Church in leadership. For the full decision and comments by the national President see www.nat.uca.org.au.

Ms Rowena Allen, newly elected as one of Uniting Network Australia's Co-Convenors stated that the resolution was "a fantastic witness", especially to young gays and lesbians.

"This vote affirms us. We are united in our diversity and we can celebrate that. We can all know our gifts and graces are from God, for the work of the church and the world...Gay and lesbian young people who think it's a choice, as I once did, between sexuality and spirituality can see it's not — there's a place they can be affirmed."

The Revd Dr Dorothy McRae-McMahon, Australia's most well known lesbian minister, put the matter in historical perspective when she told the Melbourne Age: "I would be very grieved if people leave the church — we're a family — but the gospel is the gospel, and I'm convinced the church is standing on the ground of the gospel. It's the authentic and honourable position to hold...This is our century. The last century was for women, the one before that was for slaves. This is the century for gay, lesbian and transgender people. You can see the issue evolving both culturally and religiously, and the sky hasn't fallen in."

"This is a distinctively Australian and Uniting Church way forward", stated Warren Talbot, who was the only gay member of the Church's national Assembly Task Group in the 1990s. "We may not have the precise clarity of the United Church of Canada, but we have avoided the trap many of our partner churches in the English-speaking world have fallen into when they endorsed 'celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage' as church doctrine. The July 2006 Assembly decision is a historic UCA settlement, which frees us all to minister together in positive ways under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Uniting Network elects national leaders - thanks Libby Patterson

Uniting Network Australia elected a new leadership team at the daring gathering in Perth, June 2006. Leading the team will be Rowena Allen and the Revd Robert Humphreys. Ms Allen is a senior UnitingCare executive in regional Victoria (Shepparton), and has also served the Church in the Victorian Synod Youth Unit, and as an Assembly Member, 1997. Mr Humphreys is the Minister in placement at the West Hawthorn Uniting Church in Melbourne, having originally been ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and editing their national publication. Mr Humphreys is now pioneering a ministry with the LGBTI communities in Melbourne, including an Evening Service of Worship and community work with the lesbian ALSO Foundation. Ms Allen and Mr Humphreys bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their shared positions as National Co-Convenors. Robert also brings continuity, having served the Network in the same capacity from 2004-06.

Rowena and Robert will be joined by Andrew O from SA as National Secretary, and Meredith Knight from NSW as Treasurer, plus a Committee including UN Archivist (Malcolm Cowan), UN Web Weaver (Wal Anderson), both from SA, and the NSW/ACT national representative, Leanne Hutcheson. Andrew O is a member of Unity SA, was a founding member of Uniting Network Australia, including planning and participation in the first daring conference in June 1994. Meredith Knight is a pioneering and melodious lesbian Christian from the Pitt Street Uniting Church who served on the Assembly's Dicker Committee on Homosexuality and the Church in the mid 1980s. Mr Cowan is a former National Co-Convenor of the Network, very committed to recording our her/histories. Wal Anderson is one of Australia's leading queer theologians and biblical scholars, as attested in his many groundbreaking articles. Elizabeth Teece from the NSW Synod joins the national team for the first time in her new role as Editor of *Uniting Network Review*. Elizabeth has been the Co-Convenor of Uniting Network NSW/ACT since 2000. Leanne Hutcheson is the NSW/ACT national representative, active in local, regional and state councils of the Church, and Co-Convenor-elect of the Uniting Network NSW/ACT.

Uniting Network members have thanked and paid tribute to retiring members of the National Executive, particularly our immediate past national Co-Convenor, Libby Patterson, now from WA, and originally from Tasmania. It was recognised that leading a small voluntary national organisation involves a lot of hard work, and Libby provided clarity and direction at key moments during 2004-06. Libby's presence and support (along with others) at Assembly 2006 was particularly noted and appreciated. Libby will still be involved in Uniting Network related activities.

Let's 'dare' to do it all again - in Adelaide 2008

The Perth daring gathering, June 2006, decided to return to where it all started...Adelaide. In the state that is reputed to have invented homosexuality, the first daring gathering was held there in June 1994. Now is the time to start planning to participate in Daring 2008, Adelaide (to be held on the Queen's Birthday Long Weekend).

Network argues for equal rights for same gender couples

The Uniting Network gave one of only two official Uniting Church submissions to the current Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Inquiry into same sex relationships.

The submission was signed by Elizabeth Teece (UN NSW/ACT), the Revd Ian Pearson (Pitt Street Uniting Church), and compiled by Warren Talbot (UN NSW/ACT).

Ms Teece and Mr Pearson wrote to Australia's national Human Rights Commissioners, stating their support for the following general Christian principle (moral axiom):

that committed same gender relationships should be treated, wherever possible, in an equivalent and proportional manner to different gender relationships, unless to do so is discerned to be of harm to the common weal.

HREOC will now hold public hearings across Australia, aiming to report to the Australian Attorney-General, the Honourable Mr Ruddock in the first half of 2007.

Warren Talbot comments: "It is worth noting that unlike the marriage debate in 2004-05, this HREOC Inquiry has not, to date, attracted the ire and attention of conservative Church groups. There are two main reasons for this. First, people know that HREOC is basically powerless at the moment, and that, until Mr Howard retires, the Australian Government will likely not act on most recommendations. Second, with the changes to the Marriage Act, conservative groups believe they have 'won' a tactical battle, and won't press the matter overly. Conservatives, like progressives, can only mobilise the troops on 'iconic' issues. 'Marriage' as 'different genders' is iconic for Christian conservatives. Opposition to people in same gender civil unions is not."

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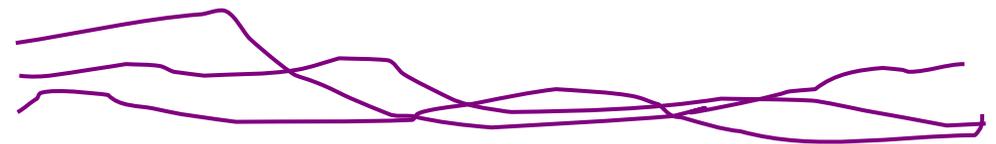
Alistair McRae to lead the Uniting Church, 2009-2012, and beyond?

The Revd Alistair McRae has been elected as President-elect of the Uniting Church. Mr McRae is well known to Uniting Network members, as he was the Chairperson of the Uniting Church's national Assembly Sexuality Task Group in the 1990s. Alistair was a guest speaker at Daring 1996 held at Wesley Mission in Melbourne. This is the first appointment of a full-time President, recognising what has been the reality for many years in terms of workload, and following the now dominant trend in Synods for Moderators to be full-time paid appointments, and what, by 2012, will be the norm for Presbytery Chairpersons (as is now the case in the Presbytery of Sydney). A bishop by any other name...

Shadow-Play, by Ranjini Rebera

*Smiling lips woven
into bewildered eyes.
The yearning to know
captive in curled fingers
reaching out in embracing arms.
The tug-of-war
of acceptance and rejection.*

*The unfinished dance of equality
shadow swirls,
dips
but dances on...*



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Assembly 2006 reflections

These reflections commence with Rosemary Hudson-Miller's speech in which she presented one of the proposals (number 38) for full equality at the Assembly. They are followed by reflections, each of which was written after the Assembly. Rosemary, David and Ian were Assembly members. Leanne participated through the Visitor's Program.

"I have a dream..." by Rosemary Hudson-Miller, WA Synod

...That one day we will live in a fully inclusive Uniting Church. The 1977 Statement to the Nation and the Basis of Union called us to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God, and called us to be a pilgrim people on the way to that end.

For me that vision not only incorporates eternal life in 'fullness of life', but also freeing from restrictive theological understandings such as the Hebrew Scriptures' purity laws that saw people with disabilities, Gentiles, and women as unworthy. Having foreigners, people with disabilities and women like Lydia and Phoebe in leadership roles in the early church was a radical move for Jewish theological understandings of that time.

We give thanks to God for the ministry of lay and ordained women in leadership roles in the church. Fifty years ago we would not have had this. Five hundred years ago in fact none of you married male ministers could have been ordained either!

In our decision making about leadership in the Uniting Church there are some crucial questions that need to be considered. Are we going to be consistent with the Basis of Union, which commits us to take seriously contemporary scientific thought? Current research shows that it is not only our genes which determine our maleness and femaleness but also the surge of hormones at the sixth week of gestation. It is the amount of testosterone released which changes the foetal brain from its original female layout into a male one. A wide spectrum of variations results from this genetic and hormonal combination including female babies with male brains, male babies with female brains, and four babies in a thousand being born transgendered with both male and female genitalia. (More of this research is cited in this document 'Coming Out Alone') It is out of such foundations that our identities and relationships are formed. God did indeed 'knit us together in our mother's wombs'. Who are we to question the uniqueness of life which God created?

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So are we going to be informed by Jesus' kingdom vision with his sense of freeing us to fullness of life and loving relationship? Or are we going to allow ourselves to be informed by fears and insecurities or by theological and biblical interpretations such as those which saw the Catholic Church limiting ordination to celibate males in the 13th century? The emerging Protestant churches of the 16th century journeyed beyond that in determining that married men could be ordained. Regretfully, it took another four hundred years before churches risked taking the bushel basket off women's leadership light.

Just as women had undertaken ministerial roles in churches long before official affirmation, so there are gay, lesbian and transgender people in our church who have been faithfully providing ordained ministry and enriching church life for centuries. Are we to deny this? Many of us can remember that before the decision about women in ordained ministry was made, people thought it was an impossibility. But once it was made, people said "why did it take so long?"

The Uniting Church has not shied away from deciding for the right and just claims of Aboriginal people and women. Let us not shy away from the right and just claims of gay and lesbian people called to ministry to 'work hard in the Lord'. We *are* a pilgrim people on a journey. God's radical love is *indeed* calling us on to be people of the kingdom, calling us now to be the people of God in this age and in this place, calling us to be an inclusive and just church.

Wonderful things by David Beasland, Uniting Network WA

Love and greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I have been asked to write about my experiences of our national Assembly which met in Brisbane from the 5-11 July 2006.

Wonderful things happen at Assembly. We were met at the Airport, and for the WA group, taken by coach to our colleges where we were to stay other people. We were given a train ticket to go to a station close to the University and a shuttle bus took us to the Colleges. The food was wonderful and the volunteers did a wonderful job showing us where to go and answered any questions that were asked. There were a many great moments. Uplifting worship, marvellous bible studies were led by Rev Dr Mvune Dandala from Africa.

There were peaceful early morning communion services where one could sit quietly and pray for the coming day, fine leadership from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, wonderful input from the 30 overseas guests
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and important decisions on many matters that will contribute to the life and mission of the Church. The Sunday night festival of praise was a wonderful witness to *God's Word in God's World*. The offering was \$7000, which will be sent to our sisters and brothers struggling for freedom in West Papua.

The statement from the Congress deeply moved the Assembly. You will see that the Congress committed itself to remaining in the Uniting Church while reiterating their opposition to the ordination of people in same-gender relationships. (You can view this on the Assembly website)

I guess the highlight for me is in giving a presentation as a seconder of Proposal 37. This was presented by Rev Ian Pearson. Those of you that were unable to be present at Assembly the following is what I said as a seconder:

The Leadership and Sexuality issue found us engaged in many hours of intense heartfelt discussion, love, respect, deep listening and praying for God's Word to be discerned.

"It gives me pleasure in being a seconder of this proposal. All the times that I have visited Sydney, I have attended Pitt Street for worship and I have always been welcomed and accepted by the people of this congregation. To me this is how a church should be. As a gay person within the Uniting church one can relate to the story of "Daniel in the Lions Den". You never know how people are going to react when they know that you are gay. All GLBT people want is to be recognized for our strengths, talents and contribution to the church.

The sexuality issue has caused pain and destruction of the lives of gay and lesbian people. The Church needs to move forward in this area with acceptance of all people regardless of race, culture and sexuality. The church also needs to be true and honest to itself in as much as Ministers log onto the internet for resources on ways to make their sermons appealing and interesting. Some of those resources have been written by G & L people as well as some of the songs. Many liturgies that are used have been written by G & L people. My question to you is, if it is ok to use our resources why can't we be accepted for who and what we are?

Reflect for a moment on what gives meaning to your life. Is it your family your friends? Perhaps it is the work that you are doing or the achievements you have made along the way? These things are important for they provide a sense that our lives have been useful. It is not just what we have done or the relationships, which we have - it is the memories of these things which are
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equally important. As a Christian, I am reminded that ultimately meaning is not found in what I do or in my relationships, important as these things are. Meaning is found in the fact that I am a person created by God and therefore important to God no matter what my external situation may be. Time does not permit me to go into the painful journey of the coming out process, or the amount of youth suicides or the discriminations the G & L people have to live with each day of their lives. So come and track me down and we will talk."

As a result of me saying the above throughout the rest of the Assembly I had people come up to me and give me support. It was an uplifting experience and I came away from Assembly with the feeling that I had been given a blanket of love and warmth.

The Leadership and Sexuality issue found us engaged in many hours of intense heartfelt discussion, love, respect for one another and deep listening and praying for God's Word to be discerned. It is difficult to pass on to others what Assembly meant, but as a gay person who gave a presentation I felt stuck out on a limb and I was grateful for Robert H, Rowena, Libby, Bev, Leanne and the many other supporters that were there I had a good try and I was told that I certainly got my point across. It was an amazing experience for me.

Affirmed and hopeful; St Luke 9 in lesgay eyes

by Leanne Hutcheson, Presbytery of Parramatta Nepean, Synod of NSW

The 11th Assembly could be considered to be the Assembly of the 'middle church'. Many members expressed this view and contrasted this Assembly to the 10th, which was thought to have been about extreme viewpoints regarding sexuality. All members that I spoke with remarked about the openness and care shown in the discussion from people on all sides of the sexuality debate.

For me, it was a chance to re-connect with two of my past ministers, one from my early childhood and one from my early 20's era. It was enlightening hearing about their journeys in their theological life, particularly when I had presumed they held different points of views. Both ministers expressed support for me particularly the minister who has seen that I have tried to live a Christian life just like any other Christian and not the stereotypical 'gay lifestyle'. Seeing this helped move this minister's perspective of gays and lesbians in the Church.

Even though I felt apprehensive about how the sexuality debate would play out, by the end of Assembly I felt both affirmed and hopeful for the growth of the

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Uniting Church. The adherence to the discussion ground rules by both Assembly members and visitors reassured me that this debate is being taken seriously and with compassion. I felt that this showed it is possible to hold different views with integrity and our Christian love and respect towards each other.

In contrast to the hope felt from Assembly 2006, is the distress being caused by the release of the charter for the Confessing Congregations. This charter claims the 11th Assembly abandoned the principles of 'orthodox doctrine' on the question sexuality and leadership even though no such doctrine has ever existed. Once again we are seeing a small number of people trying to manipulate Church members to support their own viewpoints. It was with some annoyance expressed from Assembly members that this small group have hijacked the terms evangelical and Reformed Evangelical tradition to support for their own beliefs. I don't understand why this group of people can't see that they don't have to change their beliefs but just accept that other people can hold different points of view other than their own.

It is interesting that they have now chosen to use the word 'apostasy' as that is what Jews thought about Samaritans as mentioned in Luke. It was clear that Jews and Samaritans had little to do with each other and this is apparent in Luke 9:51-56 when Jesus rebukes the disciples for wanting to destroy the Samaritan village and Jesus avoids entering the village at all. It only makes the parable of the Good Samaritan all the more explosively confronting. Imagine the parable being told like this:

A woman was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when she fell into the hands of robbers who beat her, stripped her and left her half-dead. A priest (minister) happened to be travelling the same road, saw the woman but passed by on the other side of the road. So too, a Levite (elder) saw the woman but passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan (lesgay person/supporter) saw the woman, took pity on her and bandaged her wounds. S/he put the woman on her donkey, took her to an inn, asked for care for the woman and paid the expenses.

If people were to hear the story with today's equivalent of the characters, those mentioned in brackets, I think this story would have the same impact that it would have when Jesus first told it. It would show that lesgay people or 'apostates' can reveal God's love and mercy to the world and be a model for all of us, particularly those who think they are the righteous Christians who know the Law. People just need to hear it.

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My first Assembly by Ian Pearson, Pitt Street Uniting Church

2006 was my first Assembly, so I wasn't quite sure what to expect. As someone who has served the church in a number of congregations in NSW/ACT I have always been interested in Assembly developments, but have never had the opportunity or seen the need to be directly involved in an Assembly meeting.

On balance, I was pleased with the outcome of the meeting concerning sexuality and leadership. I was satisfied with the words agreed by nearly 80% of Assembly members, and believe that every speaker was heard with respect. The words agreed recognise the pain felt by lesbian and gay people in the Church. When reporting to the Presbytery of Sydney on 18 July, I stated that I believed that the Assembly was very pastoral in how it went about its business.

At the Assembly I presented a proposal which reflected my own convictions on the matter of human sexuality. The proposal, background and rationale were written by Warren Talbot, a member of my Congregation. Warren had also urged me to press on with the proposal, and to not agree to Assembly Business Committee ideas to link it to any other proposal. At the Assembly, this advice worked well. The seconder was David Beasland from the Uniting Network in WA. David was the only Assembly member to identify as an openly LGBTI person. I am very grateful that David and I had the chance to talk in January 2006, and that David made the courageous stand to be an openly gay Christian man at the Assembly.

It is not possible for our concerns for LGBTI people to go away. Indeed, I see the ongoing efforts for full equality for LGBTI people to be part of the Gospel call to ministry and mission. We are fortunate to be doing this in a denominational context which welcomes diversity. I have no doubt that many people in the "middle" will welcome the decision as a freedom to continue exploring their attitudes. That is a good thing. The Pitt Street Congregation will continue to journey with LGBTI people, seek and pray for their full acceptance in the wider Uniting Church. I commend and encourage members of the Uniting Network, throughout Australia, in continuing to challenge all of us as we discern *God's Word in God's World*.

The Assembly of Confessing Churches formed post Assembly seems to me to be a concession to the fact that our Uniting Church has already decided in favour of LGBTI clergy. If they concede that, then our legislative work may already be over and the task ahead, only for a generation or so, for the decision to work its way more fully through the church.

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“Gossip and bitch: The wo/men at the well” St John 4 -- A Bible Reflection

by Elizabeth Moran, Uniting Network NSW/ACT

Edited, with permission, from a reflection and devotion by Ms Moran from the Eastwood Uniting Church, Sydney, delivered at the Uniting Network NSW/ACT Committee Meeting, April 2005. Ms Moran also provided a structured conversational narrative of the Gospel Reading, which is available on request.

The woman is an outcast in her town. Why else would she be at the well at the hottest time of the day? She is obviously avoiding the other women in the town who probably shun her and then gossip and bitch about her behind her back - but will not take the time to get to know her and maybe find out her true story. I particularly like the complete acceptance of the woman that Jesus has, despite all that she has done (or not done).



Jesus shows us, by his example, that by taking the time to talk to people, to get to know them and to meet them where they are at and by accepting them unconditionally, that a better and a different society might be established. Jesus speaking to the woman is against the social etiquette of the times - not only because she was a woman but a Samaritan one at that! Despite this, Jesus does take the time to get to know the woman. By engaging with her and finding out her story, he has the chance to show his broader love of all people.

The woman, of course, is amazed that anyone is speaking with her - let alone a man and a Jew - and about something as ordinary as water. Through the symbol of water Jesus is able to turn the conversation so that it has multiple meanings - well water to quench the ordinary everyday thirst; living water to nourish the spirit and soul within.

A rejected woman brought God's love to a whole town. The Uniting Network is a small group within the Uniting Church - can we be the tool that God is using to show God's unconditional love and acceptance to the lesbian and gay communities and to the wider world?

Contributors, UNR, September 2006

David Beasland is a member of the Uniting Network (WA), Chairperson of the Patorial Relations Committee, Perth Presbytery, and was a Member of Assembly 2006; Revd Gregor Henderson is the national President of the Uniting Church in Australia; Revd Harry Herbert is the Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW/ACT; Revd Rosemary Hudson-Miller is the Social Justice Consultant with the WA Synod; Leanne Hutcheson is the National Representative, UN NSW/ACT; Elizabeth Moran is a Committee Member, UN NSW/ACT; Andrew O is a member of Unity SA, and Secretary of UN Australia; Revd Ian Pearson is the minister-in-placement, Pitt Street Uniting Church; Ranjini Rebera, from the Uniting Church in Canberra, is a former Women's Moderator of the Christian Conference of Asia.

Uniting Church in Australia

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