



Uniting Network Australia

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NSW/ACT - Uniting Network NSW/ACT

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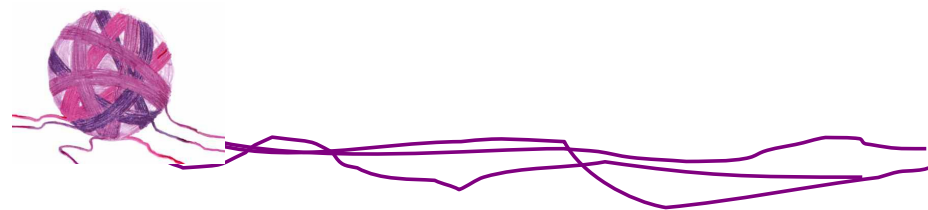
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uniting network review

faith | gender | sexuality | education

volume 7 | number 1 | may 2008



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Uniting Network Review (UNR) is a publication of Uniting Network Australia (UNA). Subscription is via membership of the Network. UNR is edited and produced by UN NSW/ACT, which since 1989, 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. Our primary purpose is to share the love and grace of God in Her world.*

Contributions are welcome

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 hardcopy by mail to PO Box 98 Enmore NSW 2042. Where authorship has not been stated, news, views and articles have been 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:

Decisions about the future of UNR will be made at Daring 2008 in Adelaide.

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Editorial – Weaving our Futures

Over the June 2008 long-weekend, the members and friends of Uniting Network Australia (UNA) will be gathering in Adelaide under the theme of “weaving our futures”. It is a suggestive and forward-looking theme, and promises to be an important gathering in our journey of faith together.

I am not a weaver, in the literal sense, but the requirements are fairly clear. You need a loom (a solid foundation); materials to work with (sturdy and diverse); people to do the weaving (those who carry the tradition of weaving, those learning, forgetting and re-learning); and a blend of a pattern of what is being woven plus lots of creativity. Uniting Network Australia has all four.

We have a solid foundation. Although the networking of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, with our families, friends and supporters in the Uniting Church, did not commence in Adelaide, June 1994, that is the solid foundation of UNA and the biennial daring gatherings.

We have sturdy and diverse materials to work with. These include the many words found in our sacred texts; the UCA’s special faith documents; and in the seven visionary “daring statements” we have woven. We have the many words we have all written and spoken during the past 14 years, whether wise or foolish, considered or hasty, uplifting, painful or just plain silly. They all contribute to the pattern. Weaving is a fairly rough craft. It does not have the finesse of crotchet, and neither does UNA.

We have the people - women and men of courage and fear, faith and doubt, myopia and vision, and everything in between! For some, Daring 2008 will be their first gathering. For others, Adelaide 1994 will be alive and fresh in our memories. Some weavers have moved away/on, some have moved in and out. We all weave our way, as best we can.

We have both pattern and creativity. The pattern is nothing less than full equality for LGBTI people in all areas of the church’s life and leadership, and liturgical recognition of same sex relationships. The creativity includes how we express the pattern in different contexts, and the strategies we deploy to achieve the pattern at any one point in time.

There is more than one loom and more than one weaver. At its best, the Daring Gathering will enable us to weave our futures together - knowing that the Spirit weaves with us.

Warren Talbot, Deputy Editor

Uniting Network Reports and News

Community healing in Penguin, Tasmania

by Peter Weeks

During the early part of 2007 genuine debate over issues of heritage and development in the North-West Tasmanian coastal town of Penguin spilled over into personal attacks, unhelpful media coverage, and very public anti-gay activities. The proponents of some of the controversial developments were an openly gay couple, who had moved here from Sydney a few years earlier.

The Penguin Uniting Church elders had reflected on the situation, and were concerned that while the anti-gay activities were directed specifically at the developers, they affected many in the community. As a result it was decided to hold a Community Healing and Reconciliation Service in the church, to which members of the general community would be invited. The service was held on Wednesday, May 2nd, in the evening. About 30 people were present, nearly half of whom were from beyond the congregation’s membership. They included the mayor and another councillor, the developers and some of their friends, and other members of the gay community.

The flyers that had been distributed around the town described the event as: *Strengthening the bonds of community.*

Listening to the voices of the hurt.

On arrival people were given a small stone. During the service a number of people read out brief stories based on others’ experiences. These proved to be very moving. Then after a prayer of confession and declaration of God’s love, people were invited to come forward and exchange their stones for symbols of hope - a flower, a butterfly, a candle or a rainbow ribbon - and to think of one small act of reconciliation they could make.

The following prayer was offered:

*God of creation and difference
of rainbow colours
and dull drab days.*

*God who delights in diversity
yet understands our fear of difference
open our hearts to new ways of understanding
send your spirit to us
so tolerance, loving kindness, compassion and acceptance flower within us.*

*Give us the courage to speak our truth
and to hear the truth of others
with open-mindedness and respect
even when there is disagreement.*

The full text of the service is available from me: johnweeks1@bigpond.com

Diversity, Victoria

Pride March Victoria recognises and celebrates the people and events that inspire the courage, solidarity, pride, diversity and strong sense of community of Victoria's gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex and transgender people. "The annual Pride March is our signature event and celebrates a bright future while preserving our history. It is a key date on Victoria's cultural calendar and a destination for interstate and international visitors". The first Pride March was held in February 1996. This year's 13th annual Pride March saw Shepparton's own UnitingCare - Cutting Edge (UCCE) "Diversity" support program group for 15 - 25yr old same-sex attracted and transgender young people (SSATYP), march collectively, with excitement, commitment and a lot of heart.

Traveling along Fitzroy St, St. Kilda, departing from Lakeside Dr @ 3.00pm, arriving at the Catani Gardens (beach-side), the awesome spectacle of a March concluded with a colourful free concert and beach party. Rainbow Warehouse, drag queens, music, food and fanfare entertained appreciated "Diversity's"

SSATYP, well into the early hours of the evening, before boarding the UCCE mini-bus, headed for home.

"Diversity" continues a fortnightly meals program, Eating "Out", where SSATYP can learn to cook healthy, nutritious meals, enhance their social and 'life skills', and in doing so, enjoy a greater sense of connection to local community, enhance self confidence and better understand safe, positive relationships, learn about sexual health information, and think about / discuss future strategies for addressing all of the above issues, including driving their own advocacy. The first Eating "Out" event was a success, with spaghetti Bolognese and a brisk walk around town attracting 5 young people, and each fortnight's event promises to be nothing short of just-as-fabulous, with tacos, nachos, home-made pizzas, lamb souvlakis and more, yet to come, followed by a movie or guest speaker!

The young people from the "Diversity" program look forward to meeting you ALL at this year's Daring in June. "Join in", they say, and follow the leaders of tomorrow and today!



Pictured (left) is Damien ("Diversity" Program Officer & UNA Vic. Representative) with happy "Diversity" members (from left to right) Rob, Drew and Graeme.

Uniting Network - Victoria

By Rev Robert Humphreys, Co-Convenor Uniting Network Australia

While there are a number of individual members of Uniting Network across Victoria, there is no regular organised meeting as such at the present time. Various efforts have been made in the past few years to gather interested people for worship/fellowship but the response to such efforts has been very limited.

For information please contact Rev Robert Humphreys on 03 93547793 or robhumphreys58@yahoo.com.au.

Unity South Australia

by Marelle Harisun, Co-chairperson, Friends of Unity, SA

Things have been changing in South Australia. We have two groups in SA -- Unity, a meeting of glbt people for mutual support, meeting monthly, and Friends of Unity (FoU), the families, friends and supporters of glbt people in the Uniting Church, meeting about bimonthly in general meetings, and taking political and advocacy action on behalf of glbt people. After over a year of consultation between the two groups, we decided late in 2007 to come together as one group, still named "Friends of Unity", focused on working for a truly inclusive Church, and providing more active support for members of Unity. We agreed to meet together on the "even" months of the year, with Unity meeting separately on the "odd" months.

We had our first joint meeting in February at our new venue, Pilgrim Uniting Church, with over 20 people attending. We commenced with a shared meal (more like a banquet!), joined in getting to know you activities, generated a huge number of ideas for activities in the shared meetings, with the Eucharist to conclude the night. There was high enthusiasm evident for this new way of working together, with a commitment to regular attendance from those who in the past who have not done so at Unity meetings.

The combined group will continue to share in a regular Carol Service in December in the western suburbs, an ecumenical activity for glbt people and

supporters. Unity continues to hold a January barbecue, and a mid-year meeting in a home.

FoU Executive has expended most of its energy on this change, and on planning for the Daring Gathering over the Queen's Birthday weekend 6-9 June (see later item). We have not sent out newsletters for some time, as we could not get a person to take responsibility for this role and have suffered through our lack of communication with members. However, we now have a great list of former and current supporters (with or without email access), and have decided to take responsibility as a group for generating a regular newsletter after each of our meetings. Executive members will generate the items, and forward them to the Secretary, who will email the collation to the list. We will also mail copies to those who do not have access to the "net".

We look forward to increased attendance and support for FoU/Unity in the future across this Synod.

Uniting Network NSW/ACT

by Leanne Hutcheson, Co-Convenor, UN NSW/ACT

The major activities of the Network during the past year have included Synod 2007, including a Synod Lunch Session; the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Fair Day; and continued collaboration with the United Theological College (also now a campus of the Charles Stuart University School of Theology).

Uniting Network NSW/ASCT has produced four issues of Uniting Network Review since Daring 2006. Some issues have been delayed due to the lack of contributions, and thus the planned quarterly schedule has not been met. UN NSW/ACT would like to hear the views of members of Daring 2008 and the wider Uniting Network before making any decision about whether it might continue to provide editorial and production services for UNR.

The Common Dreams conference was held at Pitt St in August 2007 where we were able to have a resource table and several of our members engaged in some good conversations.

At Synod 2007, the NSW/ACT Committee launched another “rainbow series” brochure on Pastoral Care. This brochure is aimed at UCA people who provide pastoral support to GLBTI people. Our Synod lunchtime session was a collaboration with the Synod Youth Unit, which was very successful. There is definite interest from the Youth Unit in further collaboration work to support GLBTI youth in NSW/ACT. This session was also used to promote the Coming Out conference.

In December 2007, the Coming Out conference was held in conjunction with UTC, UnitingJustice, The ELM Centre and PaCT which promoted discussion, thought and a very positive attitude amongst participants. It was UTC’s major annual conference for 2007. The keynote speaker, Lisa Isherwood was certainly welcomed and enjoyed and Keith Garner’s presentation was well attended.

The NSW/ACT Committee again had an information stall at Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 2008 Fair Day, which attracted interest in where to go for a safe Uniting Church congregation. The bulk of conversations related to what congregation to attend as opposed to the hurt people have suffered from churches so it seems things have moved to a more positive note.

Our Committee thanks the National committee and Bev Fabb for providing the report from the Working Group on Doctrine colloquium. The NSW/ACT committee is curious to know what the next steps are and will UNA be consulted in future work of the Working Group.

The NSW/ACT Committee would also like to recognise the work Warren Talbot has contributed over many years to the work of Uniting Network. Warren is currently having a well earned break from his involvement as a member of the Committee, but is continuing in a number of roles, including with Uniting Network Review and representing UN NSW/ACT on a Planning Group for an Interfaith LGBTI Service in Sydney.

Committee members Leanne Hutcheson, Elizabeth Moran, Jonathon Rea and Elizabeth Teece were voting members of the 2007 Synod. Leanne sits on the Synod Standing Committee (as a representative of the Parramatta Nepean Presbytery) and Jonathon Rea sits on the Board of UnitingCare NSW/ACT. Leanne and Warren represented the UN NSW/ACT on the planning Group for Coming Out 2007.

During 2006-08 Committee members have been: Lizzie Groves, Leanne Hutcheson, Elizabeth Moran, Jonathon Rea, Warren Talbot and Elizabeth Teece. Uniting Network NSW/ACT is a formal link Agency of the Uniting Church in Australia (Synod of NSW/ACT), reporting to the wider Church through the Synod Board of Education.

Uniting Network Australia - email list protocol

Founded around the time of the 1997 Uniting Church National Assembly in Perth, the Uniting Network Email List aims to create a safe space for sharing opinions, supporting the development of ideas and strategies, and providing members with relevant information relating to the participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in the life of the Uniting Church, the wider church and the community.

In today’s world of super fast communication, the Email List has proven to be an effective tool for quickly gathering views on the best way to respond to emerging issues of interest to Uniting Network members. The List has also been one way of sharing the joys, sorrows, frustrations and achievements in the lives of its participants, and helps many people to remain in touch with what is happening between the biennial Daring gatherings.

There are times when the Email List can be very quiet, so much so that on more than one occasion participants have been known to post a message just to check they haven’t accidentally been disconnected! In contrast, when there is a hot topic for discussion, messages can fly back and forth with such speed that it can be a bit challenging to keep up.

The Email List has always operated semi-independently of the Uniting Network itself, and you don’t have to be a financial member of Uniting Network to participate as long as you agree with the aims of the Network. Recently, the Network’s Executive has developed a Protocol to provide clarity to Email List members on how to interact with each other and use the information that is posted to the List - this Protocol is available on the Uniting Network website at www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au.

If you would like to become a member of the Email List, please send an email to aobst@hotmail.com with the subject title “Join UN Email List”. This email

should clearly state your name and confirm that you have read and agree with the Email Protocol, and include a short paragraph introducing yourself to the rest of the Email List members. From there, an email is sent to the List seeking the endorsement of at least two current members for your request to join - this step is designed to ensure that the List remains a safe space where participants can post messages openly. Once this endorsement phase has been completed, you will be notified that your membership has been accepted and receive the profiles of all the other members, while your introductory paragraph will be sent to the rest of the List for their information.

Daring Gathering 2008



"DARING TO WEAWE OUR FUTURES"
UNITING CHURCH GATHERING OF GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL,
TRANSGENDER PEOPLE, THEIR FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS
ADELAIDE, 6 - 9 JUNE, 2008
Early Bird registration by March 31 @ \$110
Normal registration by May 2 @ \$130 (Conc. @ \$100)
Cheque/Money Order/Credit card payment &
Registration Form available @ www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au
For more information, please contact: Damien Stevens or Ro Allen,
daring@ucce.org.au, 0418 511 562 or visit www.unitingnetworkaustralia.org.au

It's happening again! 2008 is the year for another Daring Gathering, and this time it's in Adelaide where it all started in 1994, with "Daring to speak - daring to listen". Once every two years glbt people, their families, friends and supporters meet in a capital city for a gathering to share their experiences, develop the vision further, and make a statement to the Church.

The theme for this year is ***"Daring to weave our futures"***. We will meet at Church of the Trinity, Goodwood Road, Clarence Park, where the congregation has enthusiastically invited us to share their facilities. Disabled friendly, so no steps to negotiate, a labyrinth used regularly by the Congregation for us to experience, good catering facilities, and great spaces for workshops. The

church itself has flexible seating suitable for creative worship experiences. Rev Gregor Henderson, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, will attend and share his ideas on the theme as well as engage in dialogue with us. Rev Helen Alexander, currently at Pilgrim Uniting Church, a Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, clinical psychologist, social worker, former University Chaplain, will lead the Bible Studies from her unique perspective around the theme. We will reflect on our journey thus far within the church and society, and dream the ideal future towards a truly inclusive Church. Workshops focused on walking the labyrinth, the Canadian experience (20 years ahead of us), a consideration of power in the UCA and how this relates to the "sexuality debate", and creating a "weaving" to be used in Sunday evening worship will be offered twice. The local congregation has invited participants to share lunch with them on Sunday (cost \$5 on the day).

The Saturday night dinner has always been a feature. This time we have booked "Vagabondo" at North Adelaide, and chosen a menu offering a range of foods at a range of prices (entrees: \$8-\$12; mains: \$12-\$25), with vegetarian and gluten free available. We will have our own space for the dinner.

People will be provided with a list of "friendly" churches for Sunday morning if they wish to attend worship, and share in a variety of approaches to music and liturgy.

We look forward to linking with people from the various groups linked into Uniting Network to share in a great time of friendship, learning, worshipping, creating, and dreaming our futures towards the full inclusion of glbt people in the life and ministry of the Uniting Church."

Interfaith LGBTI Service for Sydney

Acceptance Sydney (the Roman Catholic LGBTI group) is leading an initiative, which will see an interfaith LGBTI service held in Marrickville on Wednesday 18 June 2008. Acceptance has received a grant from the Marrickville Council to support to the Service. The Service recognises the 30th anniversary of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, and seeks to promote LGBTI faith groups in Marrickville. The organising committee includes a number of LGBTI faith groups including MCC and Uniting Network NSW/ACT. As part of Sydney's inner west, Marrickville is home to increasing numbers of LGBTI people and organisations.

Australian news

Sexuality and Leadership Consultation

Source: Assembly Update, April 2008

"In 2006, the Eleventh Assembly requested the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine to engage in further work to assist the Church in its ongoing consideration of the theological diversity on the issue of sexuality and leadership.

In light of that resolve, the National Working Group on Doctrine organised a consultation on Sexuality and Leadership in the Church, February 2008. Despite a history of tension and division across the church on this issue, the Associate General Secretary, Rev. Glenda Blakefield, said of the consultation in February, "There was a high level of graciousness and a genuine concern for wanting to move forward on this issue".

The President, Rev. Gregor Henderson, agreed. "It was an important piece of work, particularly with regards to the spirit of care and collegiality within the room," he said.

The consultation has resulted in directions for the Working Group on Doctrine to do work in the areas of:

- The doctrine of human persons and relationships
- Divergence of biblical hermeneutics
- Apostasy

- The doctrine of marriage
 - Strengthening the doctrinal process"
-

Attack on Justice Kirby

A Sydney Anglican priest, Revd Richard Lane, once wrote to High Court judge Justice Michael Kirby urging him to join an "ex-gay" ministry or face the wrath of God. Justice Kirby revealed this at a seminar on homosexuality and the church sponsored by St James Anglican Church in Sydney.

In a series of letters to the prominent jurist, the rector of St Stephen's Church in Bellevue Hill, Rev Richard Lane, urged Kirby to "cast yourself on the mercy of Jesus ... admit your sin, confess your wrongdoing and turn in humble repentance to the Lord Jesus, who alone can forgive you". Lane concluded his first letter with a referral to controversial "ex-gay" ministry Liberty. "I am aware that the very step of repentance would likely involve an enormous change of lifestyle and that help may be needed" Lane wrote.

"In that respect, I draw your attention to a recent article about God's healing of homosexuality and the work of Liberty Christian Ministries Inc which can be found on the Sydney Anglican website." Lane wrote that for Kirby to call himself a Christian Anglican was a "perversion of truth" and to continue to do so without changing his lifestyle would brand him, like Herod, a "coward, a liar, a deceiver" and a "lawless one".

In response, Kirby accused the churchman of using intemperate language, ignoring modern discoveries about sexual orientation and missing the "central loving message of Jesus and the Gospels". "There is not a single word of Jesus that sustains the thesis of animosity in your letter," Kirby stated. "It reads like the writings of many lawyers I know who fix on isolated texts, which they misunderstand, and ignore the whole point conveyed by the context and purpose of the document.

"It is self-evidently absurd to suggest that [gay] people are evil wrong-doers. That would truly be a presumption to attribute such an error of genetics/hormones to God. This realisation obliges us, in the current age, to

re-read the scriptural texts (often metaphors for mysterious truths) with fresh eyes granted to us by contemporary science.”

Lane's initial letter came in response to Kirby's comments on ABC Radio last year about his continued involvement in the Anglican Church.

Kirby told ABC's Monica Attard: "I am a Christian Anglican who's been brought up in that tradition, comfortable with it, believing in a loving religion and believing in the message that Jesus brought to love one another and to be reconciled with one another. And that is a very comfortable religion for me and therefore is still important for me."

(Sources: various reports, Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney Star Observer, Melbourne Community Voice)

“100 Revs” join the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

by Warren Talbot

A group calling itself “100 Revs” gained considerable national and international publicity in the lead up to the 2008 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, with an “apology” from the members of the group. For the record, here is the “apology” which the persons signing the statement agreed to (www.100revs.blogspot.com).

“As ministers of various churches and denominations we recognise that the churches we belong to, and the church in general, have not been places of welcome for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people. Indeed the church has often been profoundly unloving toward the GLBT community. For these things we apologise, whatever the distinctive of our Christian position on human sexuality - to which we remain committed. We are deeply sorry and ask for the forgiveness of the GLBT community. We long that the church would be a place of welcome for all people and commit ourselves to pursuing this goal.

We ARE a group of Christian ministers who voluntarily and individually bring this apology.

We ARE NOT official representatives of our churches or denominations.

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We ARE NOT making a statement on the biblical position on gay and lesbian relationships.

We ARE recognising the lack of hospitality, care and welcome that the churches have offered the gay and lesbian community.”

In the view of this writer the statement is worthy of critical examination, as is further material by the organisers. To their credit, the “100 Revs” clearly state what they “ARE NOT” doing. They are actually NOT addressing either denominational policy or the biblical basis of homophobia and heterosexism. Some of the “100 Revs” actually support denominational policies, which discriminate against LGBTI individuals and couples and do not accept gay and lesbian relationships. Indeed, it is puzzling why the New Mardi Gras Board ever accepted the float, as the statement does not accord with the constitutional aims and objectives of New Mardi Gras.

What is the statement really saying? There is nothing in the statement by the “100 Revs” which could not have been stated by Mr Fred Nile, Archbishop Peter Jensen and Cardinal George Pell and many other conservative Christians. In particular, the inability of the “100 Revs” statement to support same gender sexual relationships is a major flaw. Why apologise to lesbian and gay people if you are not also willing to affirm the expression of sexuality between persons of the same gender?

Further detail from the “100 Revs” is contained in their blogspot, as follows:

“A couple of people have raised their concern that involvement in the Mardi Gras may be seen (by church members and perhaps by the Mardi Gras organisers) as an affirmation of the promiscuity and lewdness that are part of the parade.

This is certainly not our intention. The Mardi Gras remains the iconic Gay and Lesbian event and as such is the best way of communicating with the GLBT community as a whole.

So while there is much of the Mardi Gras which disturbs us, it is the best place to communicate with those who we are trying to reach - a strategy that was familiar to Jesus (Matt 11:19, Luke 5:27; John 8:3.11.”

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In short the “100 Revs” are saying: let’s tolerate this lewd behaviour, “much of which disturbs us”, in order to reach people with the Gospel, presumably with the purpose of converting people to Christianity. Although I can take the apology as being sincere in intent and content, I cannot accept the utilitarian nature of the comment. In 1978, the “100 revs” statement would have been helpful and progressive. In 2008 it is too little, too late.

“Coming Out” national conference

by Warren Talbot

Seventy people from Australia and New Zealand gathered at the United Theological College in December for Australia’s first theological conference on the theme of “coming out”.

Conference organiser and UTC’s Lecturer in Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, the Revd Dr Jione Havea, explained that the theme emerged from discussions between College faculty and the Uniting Network NSW/ACT. “We realised that ‘coming out’ was relevant to the stories of many people, including but not limited to those of lesbian and gay folk”, Dr Havea said.

International guest speaker at the conference was Dr Lisa Isherwood, a feminist theologian from the UK. Dr Isherwood encouraged participants to think critically about concepts such as the body, sexual health education in society, and the meanings of celibacy. “I was surprised”, Dr Isherwood said, “when quite a number of my women students had decided to adopt celibacy as a positive option in their lives. This forced me to think again, theologically, about sexuality and the body, for both women and men.”

The conference heard from two keynote speakers from the Uniting Church, Revd Keith Garner and the Revd Dorothy McRae-McMahon. Mr Garner, the Superintendent of Wesley Mission Sydney, spoke of the need for the Uniting Church to ‘come out’ and embrace evangelism as a priority. Rather than “crawling up the curtain”, Mr Garner invited conference participants to think of both word and deed as evangelistic acts. Mr Garner referred to the pioneering role of the Methodist Keir Hardie in the UK labour and socialist movements; spoke of Nelson Mandela’s Christian opposition to racism and apartheid; and suggested that the real challenge to both the political left and

right in Australia on climate change would come when it affected people’s incomes.

“The Uniting Church must re-discover its passion for evangelism”, Mr Garner concluded. Revd Dr Dean Drayton, a presenter at the conference, said that Mr Garner had “proved his case”.

Minister-in-Association at the South Sydney Uniting Church, the Revd Dr Dorothy McRae-McMahon, told her story of coming out as a lesbian. Although well known to many, Dr McRae-McMahon’s story was moving. “For me”, Dr McRae-McMahon said, “coming out was a matter of honesty, before family members and friends, and the God I know and love.” Dr McRae-McMahon is a patron of the lesbian and gay youth service “2010”, and talked about the distressing rate of suicide by young lesbian and gay people, especially in rural NSW.

“Coming out of divorce” was a paper presented by a former Synod General Secretary and Assembly Secretary for Social Justice, the Revd Dr Chris Budden, himself a divorced and remarried person. Dr Budden challenged participants to see marriage and divorce as a part of the church’s story, not an individualistic matter. “Divorce must be named as ‘sin’”, Dr Budden argued, “but that is a biblical and theological statement, not a moralistic critique of the individuals concerned”.

UTC’s Liturgy Lecturer, the Revd Dr Anita Monro, challenged the Church to begin to think in different ways about God. Women have often been stereotyped as ‘virgin’ or ‘whore’, Dr Monro argued in her paper, proposing that a valuable approach would be to think about God as (M)Other. Sometimes our faith requires us to think in new ways and ‘transgress’ existing categories, Dr Monro suggested.

Macquarie University chaplain, the Revd Rod Pattenden, led the conference in two ways. In the opening session, Mr Pattenden and Ms Trisha Watts led 11 people from the group “Interplay” in delightful dance and music based on words such as “touch”, “intimacy” and “kissing”. In the final session, Mr Pattenden quietly laid out the elements of bread and wine on a massage table. “This is the body of the Christ”, he said.

Paul's letter to the Romans received serious examination, in separate papers from the Revd Andrew Collis, from the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine, and Glen Powell from the NSW Synod's Board of Mission. "Evangelicals need to read Romans anew", argued Mr Powell. "It is very unhelpful", he said, "to stop at the break at the end of chapter one. We need to keep reading to know what the Apostle was really saying about judging people". Mr Collis suggested that Paul was not talking about what we would now describe as committed lesbian and gay relationships. Mr Collis described such relationships as "differently ordered, not disordered".

The Uniting Church's National Director for Justice, the Revd Elenie Poulos, examined recent developments in Australian politics, calling for a new approach to what she described as "(com)passion". Ms Poulos was questioned whether things would change under the Government of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. "I am not sure", Ms Poulos said, "but the language will change in a positive way, and there may be more scope for the Church's concerns in civil society, social justice and human rights to be heard".

The Uniting Network's NSW Synod Co-Convenor, Leanne Hutcheson, said that the conference demonstrated that the Uniting Church has "moved on from divisive debates about sexuality", and that "lesbian and gay people are ordinary members of the Church, engaging in ministry and mission, and serving God". Jonathon Rea, a member of the Uniting Network NSW/ACT Committee and a postgraduate student at the College, has organised an annual meeting between the Network and the UTC since 2004. "It was an excellent example", Mr Rea suggested, "of the Network working co-operatively within the structures of the Uniting Church Synod. In the case of NSW/ACT, this is enabled by our formal relationship to the Synod through the Board of Education, support of the Board's Executive Director, Mr John Oldmeadow, and Faculty staff such as Dr Havea."

The conference will lead to an edited book of papers and a future meeting on a related theme.

* Dr Isherwood's contribution to the current debate in the Anglican Communion concerning LGBTI people is found as follows: Isherwood, Lisa, *Scripture for Liberation* in Andrew Linzey and Richard Kirker (Eds.), *Gays and the Future of Anglicanism: Responses to the Windsor Report*, O Books, Hants, UK, 2005, pp 49-59.

International news

Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement

by Revd Robert Humphreys, Co-Convenor, Uniting Network Australia

While holidaying in the UK and Ireland in January I had the opportunity to visit the headquarters of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement. The latter occupies two offices in a local community centre in Bethnal Green, a very multicultural London suburb. While visiting the LGCM I spent time talking with both the current Executive Director, the Rev Richard Kirker and also the new Assistant Executive Director, the Rev Sharin Ferguson. Richard, who is an Anglican priest, has been the driving force behind the LGCM for the last 30 years. He is retiring in August 2008 and Sharin (assistant pastor at London East Metropolitan Community Church) will take over as the Executive Director from Richard Kirker.

The LGCM as it has evolved has brought together people from a range of Christian denominations. Under its umbrella there are fellowships for people whose denominational background is Anglican, Evangelical, Methodist, Catholic, Reformed. Network groups also exist for people under 30 and Lesbians.

The LGCM's statement of conviction reads as follows:

"It is the conviction of the members of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement that human sexuality in all its richness is a gift of God gladly to be accepted, enjoyed and honoured as a way of both expressing and growing in love, in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Therefore it is their conviction that it is entirely compatible with the Christian faith not only to love another person of the same sex but also to express that love fully in a personal sexual relationship."

In addition to local and special interest networks, the LGCM sponsors an annual conference for all interested persons, publishes and distributes educational materials, and a regular newsletter. Through such activities the LGCM seeks to help the wider Christian church to re-examine its understanding of human sexuality, and to work for a positive acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships, so that all homosexuals may be able to live without fear of rejection or recrimination, and that lesbian and gay Christians maybe able to contribute fully to the life and ministry of the church.

As most readers of Uniting Network Review will be aware the world wide Anglican communion is engaged in a very acrimonious debate over the acceptance of gay people within that Christian tradition. Sadly, homophobia is rampant under the veneer of certain Anglican leaders claiming to be following “biblical teaching” on the subject. The LGCM is currently seeking to raise 50,000 UK Pounds to engage in a concentrated educational effort amongst Anglicans in the lead up to the July 2008 Lambeth Conference (a conference of most of the world’s Anglican bishops held once a decade). Already, Sydney dioceses Anglican bishops have opted to boycott the 2008 conference due to their disapproval of what they perceive to be the Archbishop of Canterbury’s tolerance of a pro-gay stance by many within the world Anglican community. It was encouraging to spend time with Richard, Sharin and those helping them in the LGCM’s office in the UK. It was good to share insights, concerns and I came away thinking we are not alone in Uniting Network Australia. Rather, we are part of a much wider stream within the body of Christ: one that is seeking to live out the gospel of freedom and grace as expressed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

If there are any readers of Uniting Network Review who would like to know more about the LGCM you can contact the office by email: lgcm@lgcm.org.uk or you can check out their website at: www.lgcm.org.uk

Robinson to be in Lambeth but not at Lambeth

For the first time in the history of the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Revd Rowan Williams, has not invited a duly consecrated bishop in active service, the Revd Gene Robinson, to the once-a-decade gathering of all Anglican bishops. Openly gay and living in a relationship, Robinson is the bishop of New Hampshire, USA.

What Williams hopes to achieve by this unprecedented anti-gay move to relegate a single Anglican bishop to second-class status is unclear. A group of trenchantly anti-gay Anglican bishops (including Sydney’s Archbishop Peter Jensen and all Sydney bishops) are still boycotting Lambeth and holding their own meeting. Some USA bishops considered their own boycott in response to Williams’ discrimination, but Robinson urged them against doing that. Instead, Bishop Robinson will be in Lambeth in a private capacity to meet with and

encourage gay and lesbian Christians and progressive bishops in supporting a truly inclusive Anglican Communion.

Williams’ unwise decision to discriminate against Robinson will guarantee even further media focus on the general issue and Robinson in particular.

(Source: Episcopal Life Online, Integrity USA)

Family news

“The wonder of a wedding”

by Wendy Hendry *(Note that Wendy wrote this article in August 2007. She has been married now since October 2007)*

I’m getting married in October and naturally I’m pretty happy about it. With two months until the big day it is getting close enough now that I can almost imagine it happening.

I have no doubt that the majority of brides and grooms have the same feelings of butterfly-in-the-stomach excitement. There is so much to do (and so much money to be spent) for just one day where you and your love are the centre of attention.

It’s a big, big deal. Lately I find myself drifting off in my mind thinking of how the day will look. I wake at odd hours of the morning thinking about music selections, writing speeches, hairstyles and menus. I worry about how much I am eating, and whether I will still fit into my dress on the day. But most of the time I think about how wonderful it will all be to finally say our vows and exchange rings.

This is all pretty standard so far. Sadly, there isn’t quite as much joy around me as I would have liked. Not everyone is looking forward to this day like I am. You see this will be a same sex commitment ceremony. I fell in love with a woman, who I love so much I want to spend the rest of my life with.

One of the hardest things I have found is telling people my wonderful news - friends, family and work colleagues. The initial joy at being proposed to was

dampened as I struggled to find the words to help other people understand what to me seemed like obvious good news. Every time you tell people it's like coming out all over again. I have tried many different approaches and still haven't perfected it.

It's hard to explain to people how similar my feelings are to what other people have in preparing for marriage. People see it as a political thing, or a game of playing pretend. My partner and I approach this day with all the seriousness and excitement any other couple would. But I have the feeling that we're not taken seriously in our commitment and love of one another in leading up to this day.

Some people have asked us why we would want to do it. Why go through all the 'coming out' and the expense for something that will not be legal? It seems obvious to us that it's the same reason anyone wants to get married. I don't know many couples that get married just for the legal piece of paper. They do it because they are in love and want to grow old together. They do it because they want to make a public promise to each other in front of their loved ones.

Gay marriage has become a big political issue of late, with opinion polls being held regularly to test the nation's feelings on the issue. But for us this decision isn't political. It's about love and commitment and having a loving partner to journey through life with to make the world just that bit more wonderful.



Our Co-convenor becomes a proud parent

Members of the Uniting Network were delighted to learn that one of our national co-convenors, Rowena Allen, and her partner, Kaye Bradshaw, have become the proud parents of baby Alexandra. Ro, Kaye and Alexandra were featured in a news article in the Shepparton

News which was headed "A Rainbow Family", considering some of the issues in same-sex parenting in a rural community. Mums and bub are reported to be well, with Ro on maternity leave until the end of May 2008.

Another UN member, more proud mums

On a related note, UN NSW/ACT member (and former UCA Assembly staffer), Nonie Wales and her partner Janet Irvine were featured in a recent issue of the Sydney Star Observer (1 May 2008). Nonie was speaking of her pride in being a mum to her and Janet's daughter, Grace, commending the NSW ALP Government for making legal changes to the Status of Children Act to recognise lesbian parents. Nonie stated that Grace's birth about 20 months ago was "joyful" and the legal changes were a "second blessing".

Although too slow and tentative, along with the announcement by the Rudd Government to amend over 100 pieces of federal legislation, which discriminates against same sex couples, there is some basis to believe that the legal status of our relationships and our families is finally changing. The challenge for the Uniting Church is to develop a liturgy or liturgies, which respond to this change in the wider community, affirming same-sex relationships and families.

Book Review

by Warren Talbot

Seduced by Grace: contemporary spirituality, Gay experience and Christian faith,

Michael Bernard Kelly, Melbourne, Clouds of Magellan, 2007.

Michael Kelly has been known in Australian LGBTI (and wider circles) for a number of years as the leading public figure in the Rainbow Sash movement. On Pentecost Sunday 1998, Kelly and about 75 other LGBTI people, friends and family members, attended St Patrick's Cathedral wearing rainbow sashes. When they presented to receive Communion by the then Archbishop of Melbourne (Fr George Pell) they were refused - a literal act of ex-communication. As a result the Australian Rainbow Sash movement received considerable publicity and generated debate amongst conservative and progressive Catholics (and others) alike.

Kelly speaks about his life as a contemplative, Catholic chaplain and also as an openly gay person of faith. "Through it all", he writes, "lies the story of one man's faltering attempt to discern and respond to the call of Divine Love in his life" (p. xvii). The collection comprises 39 short articles, which have previously been published in Australian newspapers and magazines, and some overseas. As a collection the articles were usually written for a specific purpose, or in response to a request, over a ten-year period of time. Kelly, as contemplative activist, is visible in each article.

Although the distinction is artificial, some of the articles are more overtly activist than others. These include the description and rationale for the original witness at St Patrick's Cathedral, an "open letter" to Pope John Paul II and a Christmas letter to Archbishop George Pell advising the then Archbishop of Melbourne that Kelly would be wearing a rainbow sash to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve 2000, and the reasons for doing that. Needless to say, Kelly was refused Communion on that occasion as well. However, my overall reading of the collection is that it is not primarily concerned with political strategies to change the Church - as much as Kelly prays, hopes and works for that.

September 11: facing the sacred centre of violence draws on the writing of James Allison to call into question some of the religious response to 9/11. Kelly

asks: who are the "evil-doers", the "faceless" people being bombed in Afghanistan? "Loaves and fishes in Nicaragua" prompts readers to think of what the Gospel means in the poverty and violence of that country. There are reflections on various points in the Christian calendar, from Christmas to Ash Wednesday to the less familiar (at least to this Protestant) the Feast of the Purification of Mary, our Holy Mother. Moving beyond Christian faith seasons, Kelly includes an essay on the coming of the winter solstice and the gifts of darkness.

Not all will agree with Kelly's approach. In a rather blunt Foreword, Australia's pioneering homosexual judge, Justice Michael Kirby of the High Court, writes that his (Kirby's) partner, Johan, would probably say to Kelly (and perhaps some others) "Why doesn't he just get over it? If the institution of the church hurts him so much, why not give it away?" Kirby replies to the doubting Johan and summarises this inspiring collection in the following words:

The answer that Michael Bernard Kelly and I would give to Johan is a simple one. We love and accept the universal message of Jesus. We deny the right of anyone to take it from us...We know that, in the end, the universality of love and belief will be restored.

Michael Kelly has and is playing his role in that ongoing task of restoration. Or might that be...Grace?
