

CROSS Purposes

*UCA 30th
Anniversary
Special
Part I:*

*reflect on
the Uniting
Church's
first 30 years*

Issue 9
May 2007

**D'ARCY
WOOD**

**IAN
BREWARD**

**DAVID
BESWICK**

...and more!

CROSS Purposes

Issue 8
March 2007
Price \$3

A forum for theological dialogue

THE SEASON OF LENT has its origins in the practice of the early church as it prepared people for their marriage with Christ in baptism at the dawn of Easter. Baptism was understood as a “dying with Christ” to the basic principles of this world and a “rising with Christ”, or “new birth”, which initiated the neophyte into the strange new world of the coming reign of God. The early church took seriously the necessity of genuine conversion as a necessary prolegomenon to discipleship. Lent was understood as the time in which candidates for baptism were tested and tried in order to establish the genuineness of their conversion. To what extent were they living the costly new way of Christ’s *diakonia*? To what extent were they still living according to the “principles of this world”, the prevailing paradigms of power and success? The early church understood, in the way that seems to elude many of our modern

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churches, that Christian discipleship usually means becoming a prophet, witnessing to a new world in the midst of a world that is passing away.

The issue of *CP* before you focuses upon the way in which the Uniting Church, particularly through its agencies of welfare provision and social care, lives between the passing of the old and the coming of the new. Uniting Church schools and service agencies are deeply dependent upon government or community funding in order to undertake the work they do. In order to obtain this funding, they must both compete with other providers and demonstrate a clear “compliance” with the policy directions already set by government. In what sense, then, does the faith of the Uniting Church—the converted and converting faith of prophetic resistance—become embodied in these

agencies? What difference does the faith of the church, and the process of theological reflection upon this faith, make to the way Uniting Church schools and agencies plan and run their various missions?

Cameron Burgess argues that a prophetic consciousness is present at the very heart of UnitingCare’s stated mission in Victoria and Tasmania. In view of this fact, he says, “agencies as a representative of the Uniting Church cannot simply play the role of servant to the state, from which much of our funding is derived”. But the temptation to do otherwise is very strong in the current funding environment, and James Haire warns that the church may be tempted to use its community service profile as a “security blanket” to insulate itself against a loss of power and prestige: the number of converted believers may be

“intermediate ‘third sector’ institutions: families, faith communities and neighbourhoods held together by love, loyalty and faithfulness” are essential. “If these were missing there would be difficulties neither government nor the markets could solve.”⁷

The onus is thus on agencies and local church alike to continue to explore mutually beneficial relationships. Whilst some agencies boast a more formal link to the church through the role of the Pastoral Carer/Chaplains/Ministers to the Mission, should these roles change focus or disappear it is extremely important that agencies have active, fruitful and sustainable relationships with one or more local churches—relationships in which we are together, exploring how we may cultivate the sense of community and belonging for individuals and families on the outer.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the question of what it is for an agency to express its Christian Identity can be answered by noting the importance of regular theological reflection. In committing to reflect regularly on the gospels of Jesus, agencies will greatly enrich both their current and future work.

Practically outworked, it means a renewed commitment to speaking prophetically to government, employing staff with a strong ethical frame-

work, encouragement of staff and board alike to reflect theologically on their work and the establishment of lasting partnerships with local churches. It is in labouring over these issues that agencies may find increasing congruence between their theological heritage and current practice.

CAMERON BURGESS is a Pastoral Care and Outreach Worker who heads the Spirituality and Disability Unit at UnitingCare Community Options.

Notes

¹ www.assembly.uca.org.au/whoweare/UCA.

² UnitingCare Victoria & Tasmania Strategic Framework: Theological foundation.

³ A. Nichols & M. Postma, eds., *The Church and the Free Market: Dilemmas in Church Welfare Agencies Accepting Contracts from Government* (Melbourne: Victorian Council of Churches, 2002) 61.

⁴ R. Banks, ed., *Private Values and Public Policy: The Ethics of Decision Making in Government Administration* (NSW: Lancer, 1983) 89.

⁵ Banks, 53.

⁶ Banks, 54.

⁷ Banks, 84.

See also M. Budde & R. Brimlow, *Christianity Incorporated: How Big Business is Buying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazo, 2002).

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of the wider Uniting Church. Agencies thus naturally seek to build an inclusive work environment that, whilst being distinctly Christian, recognizes that ethical behaviour is not a particularly Christian preserve,⁵ but is highly sought among staff.

Agencies must also seek to act as an employer who encourages a balanced work and home life. Value must be placed on family (whatever form that may take) to provide a workplace of compassion, recognizing times at which staff need to fulfil family responsibilities.

Staff should also be encouraged where appropriate to reflect theologically on their work in a corporate format that is meaningful to staff. This opportunity can form a vital expression of what it means to be an extension of the church at worship. Within the context of vocation, Christian staff members are called upon to view their work, no matter what the task, as an act of worship and an integral part of their faith. In short, the Christian views vocational decisions with as much significance as spiritual decisions.⁶ Agencies would do well to encourage staff to regularly revisit this fact.

In expressing our Christian identity, agency CEOs and their boards of governance should be encouraged to regularly take time to reflect theologically on their contribution to the agency, and its future directions. Given a worldview

that seeks not to view vocation and ministry as respectively “secular” and “sacred”, value must be placed on board members and CEO alike having regular times of reflection on the example of Jesus, and how they inform their decision making processes.

Considerations in agencies’ relationship with the church

Finally, the question must be asked as to the nature of our relationship with the Church, as agencies are a natural extension of the wider Church.

It must firstly be recognized that the organizational relationship agencies share with churches is one that offers much strength and potential. For agencies, to be seen as a vital part of the church at mission is an enormously important factor in helping us to define our identity and future.

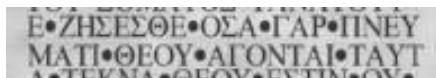
It is vital that agencies recognize the unique role of local churches, which often embody the genuine sense of local community that agencies seek to build. It is also vital that agencies recognize that the local church has a unique and integral mandate to function as a pillar in local communities, providing real answers for individuals’ issues.

As such, agencies will benefit from finding solutions to the societal issues of poverty, abuse, ageing and disability in partnership with local congregations and missions. Indeed, as Rabbi Sacks notes, these

declining, but we are winning the government service contracts, so we must still be relevant! The only way in which the church may retain its prophetic voice, even as it negotiates with funding providers, is to engage in an ongoing process of theological reflection. According to Barbara Gayler, a church that fails to critique its own practices in the light of the gospel is a church that no longer has anything prophetic to say to either government or community. Andy Calder looks at these issues from a slightly different perspective. The church has traditionally seen itself as the servant of the community, he says. But there is a danger, when the government also describes its welfare funding in terms of “service”, that the church’s self-understanding may drift toward a model of service that no longer imitates the egalitarian friendship of Christ but seeks, rather, to bully vulnerable people into lifestyles that remain dependent upon the paternalistic “charity” of the big end of town.

The articles in this issue dovetail with the questions of church polity raised in *CP* 6 & 7, which asked “How do we know that our policies and practices as church are the policies and practices of Christ?” While many would perhaps separate the apparently “internal” debates of the Uniting Church from those being generated in its “public” engagement with government and community, we do not believe that such separations are either real or helpful. The identity and

mission of the church are one, just as the mission of God in Christ and Spirit is as one with the “internal” being of God the Father. What is at issue in both spheres or discourses is the very identity and mission of the church. Is the church here to serve the “principalities and powers” of the present age, the colonizing powers of government and media, or is the church here to witness to the coming reign of God, imbued not just with any “justice and peace”, but with the justice and peace of a crucified and risen Jew? For the cross, as Paul has written, is the deconstructive wisdom of God for a world that thinks itself wise, and the reconstructive power of God for a world that knows only the power of violence. In the cross, God shows us that the “weak” are strong and the “strong” weak. In baptism we are wed to that cross, to die with Christ to all that kills us, and rise with him to all that makes us well and whole. But who can know the difference? Only God. That is one reason to work and pray for a renewal of the specifically contemplative arts and vocations for a church that is losing itself in activism. Who can know the mind of the Spirit? Only those who, with the Psalmist, seek God’s face not only in action and service—important as they are—but also in a cross-centered practice of prayer and theological reflection. Without such practices, the church is quickly absorbed into the mind and imagination of a world that is passing away.



Letters

Mission and Confession

One of the joys of this journal is the opportunity it provides for debate. I welcome Peter Whitaker's response to my article on Thomas Bandy in CP6. I am glad for those who have found Bandy's "key question" ("What is it about your experience of Jesus that your community cannot live without?") a useful tool in their faith life and worshipping communities. However, I wish to address two points made by Peter Whitaker.

Firstly, a theological critique of a mission model is always necessary to ensure that unredeemed versions of either self or culture are not permitted to overwhelm the word of God. It is the Word himself who calls, equips and sends us on mission. Our mission must be grounded in the Gospel.

Secondly, my preference for Rob Bos' alternative question ("How can we confess Christ in our context?") is dismissed by Whitaker as being "about content only". In fact the language of confession has a particular meaning in the Uniting Church and, as such, offers us a cultural bridge from Bandy's question. It comes directly from the Basis of Union:

"The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds." (§11) I agree entirely that confession engages both heart and mind.

Let us then, find ways of experiencing Christ together, in Christian community, not cut free from the Body. Let us learn anew the story of our salvation. Let us support our people to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds. Let us engage in mission using the gifts we already have in abundance.

Rachel Kronberger

Political Justification

Rowan Gill's letter is full of half-baked logic and personal innuendo typical of much pro-gay advocacy. He damns with faint praise my paper on "Neo-paganism and Bonhoeffer", neglecting to say that, on the basis of a thorough analysis of the Bonhoeffer corpus on sexuality and marriage, I am convinced that he would have opposed homosexual practice.

He then argues that, because the German Confessing Church opposed Nazism in the 1930s, opposition to homosexual practice is unjustifiable now. He misses the point. At different

will, compound people's experience of poverty or injustice. In the case that government policy is assessed as continuing to add to the plight of marginalized people by leaving them to fend within a market economy, in acting as a designated provider of government services, do we as UnitingCare agencies add in part to the continued domination of a market model by advancing its spread?

It is at this point that consideration needs to be given to whether agencies are willing to risk their favour with the Government of the day to speak prophetically to the situation. Faced with the decision to remain silent and continue with the provision of services, or to speak out with a prophetic voice and potentially jeopardize government funding, the question needs to be asked—"Which would take precedence?". For whilst our current capitalist system promises to promote the common good, to what extent do agencies of the Uniting Church operate comfortably within the realm of capitalist demands? If it is assessed that capitalism is not promoting the common good, are agencies able to step outside of the system in which we have experienced success, and value our prophetic role above that of service provision on behalf of Government?

It is in such situations as the above that it becomes essential for agencies to be informed by a responsible code of ethics which spells out their value

system in light of our unique Christian understanding. Ethics alone have little meaning without understanding the context of the objectives they serve,⁴ hence the reasons for our responsibility must be clearly articulated.

By definition, the Church and her agencies at mission present themselves as an alternative community called by God to model a distinctive way of "being" to the world. At times this may look like standing against popular capitalist or political theory. It is in being guided by this code of ethics that we can move forward with courage, where the cost of speaking prophetically may be a loss of funding for contracted services. It is essential that beyond what we do, we know who we are and feel confident to express this.

Considerations in our relationship with staff

Equal consideration must also be given to the nature of how agencies interact with staff, from selection to retention. As an employer, it is important to ask what it means for UnitingCare agencies to express their Christian identity.

Given agencies' unique identity as a Christian organization, a matching of values and ethics in recruitment becomes essential in order to hold to the ideals of delivering just, equitable and reconciliatory services on behalf

Agencies' values and vision are therefore tied with the values of UnitingCare and the Uniting Church in Australia. As an agency, the challenge is to find a live, workable expression of these values in order to further strengthen links between agency and the wider church.

What does it mean to be an agency of the Uniting Church?

An important part of UnitingCare Australia's mandate revolves around that of being a prophetic voice. Put simply, having a prophetic voice can mean speaking God's heart and perspective on a matter.

Of significance is the fact that, in order to be a prophetic voice, agencies, as representatives of the Uniting Church, cannot simply play the role of servant to the state from which much of our funding is derived. To see this as the first and foremost role of a Christian agency compromises the unique message the church carries: the message of reconciliation. For at some point, the sense of mission of the Uniting Church and agency may cause us to differ with government policy, or to refrain from delivering some Government services due to ethical or moral concerns.

Nor should the Church and her agencies seek necessarily to be the master of the State, as occurred in some parts of Europe last century. Such an arrangement has, historically,

evidenced an unhelpful brand of state religiosity, with resulting government policies, be they good or bad, being carried out in the name of God.

The favoured position must be one of existing within the current system, yet standing outside it, speaking prophetically to policies or situations that would further marginalize or inadvertently discriminate against individuals or groups.

According to Cleary,³ social justice, as opposed to "good works", is at the core of service delivery for a Christian agency. And social justice, by nature, requires a prophetic voice first and foremost to highlight the injustice at work. Such a position therefore makes it impossible to remain silent on some issues as we seek to see God's Kingdom, which embodies social justice, outworked in the world around us. If it is true that as an agency of the Uniting Church we are called to stand to one side of the sector that we trade in and act as a prophetic voice to the Government of that day, there are numerous implications to be considered in terms of our ongoing relationship with funding sources.

Considerations in our relationship with Government

One obvious issue due for consideration is that of working in collaboration with a government which may at times, by omission or

periods, Confessing Movements may be required to protest particularly aggressive forms of neo-paganism, such as Nazism and libertarianism.

His argument is based on a common but false distinction between "the great (political) issues of our time" and "peripheral (sexual) things". Contrary to what he says, I did not "brush aside" other political issues. But it is naïve and false to imply that the current debate on sexuality is not political. Gay activists, among others, often campaign on the basis that "the personal is the political", thus showing that public and private issues cannot be so easily separated.

Personal actions do have public consequences. It is regrettable that Rowan, like so many well-meaning liberals, is blind to the political triumph of pro-gay activism in Western societies. In the media, the law, welfare and education, a romanticized and sanitized image is now widely promoted. Why is he deaf to the shrill cries of prejudice which accompany even the most careful and compassionate critiques of homosexual practice? Hasn't he noticed the recent upsurge in HIV AIDS and the \$10 million campaign of the Federal Government to reduce suffering by getting gay men to take precautions when engaging in anal sex? On what grounds then does he make the false and unsubstantiated claim that homosexuality is a (non-political)

"peripheral thing"? The aggressive re-fashioning of sexuality in our own image is a matter of the highest public importance!

On the theological front, his concept of "acceptance" is inadequate to describe the redemptive grace of God in Christ. Nor will it do for bludgeoning critics. In spite of Tillich's influence and the popularity of therapeutic models of spirituality, "acceptance" is not the equivalent of "justification by grace through faith." The truly Reformed Evangelical word of justification is a word of forgiveness, reconciliation and amendment of life in line with the new justice/righteousness embodied and fulfilled "in Christ" for us. As Bonhoeffer famously pointed out, "costly grace" is redemptive, not merely accepting.

Rowan cannot expect to be taken seriously until he addresses the substantive issues. He must explain why he disagrees with the theological-Scriptural affirmation that humanity is created male and female, and that the proper form of sexual union is within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, as Christ clearly reaffirmed. The argument from silence doesn't prove, as he wrongly contends, that Jesus thought it was "peripheral". That Jesus doesn't mention other non-Jewish practices, like child sacrifice, is not proof of indifference!

Unwittingly, Rowan's letter does alert us to the need for greater

precision in articulating a theological-Scriptural basis for public issues. What is needed is a concept of justice/righteousness which integrates, rather than separates, the political and the personal.

Max Champion

Whose Comfort Zone?

Rowan Gill engages with the position held by the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church, without acknowledging its existence. He talks about "Max Champion and the others", individualizing the dissidents, rather than naming the organization and acknowledging that 90 congregations have so far chosen to join.

Revd. Gill, in the argument he presents, seems to forget that Christianity addresses the whole person, with both communal and individual responsibility to the trinitarian Creator. He commits an error unworthy of him: argument from silence. He chooses to argue from the Gospels, as if the canon which regulates the Uniting Church's faith and obedience consisted of those four books only. He adduces Stackhouse's silence on homosexuality in a work on globalization (!) as evidence of the unimportance of the issue. He then moves to the silences in Bonhoeffer's Ethics and in the Barmen Declara-

tion. Revd. Gill is anachronistic: he forgets the odium attached to homosexual acts in those days, and the fact that legislation in many countries concurred with Scripture that such acts were "abominable to God".

As a Minister of the Word I have promised to uphold the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. I have promised to adhere to the Basis of Union, because I believe that it describes that faith. In particular, I have promised to have my faith nourished and regulated by the prophetic and apostolic testimony, namely the Old and New Testaments. Therefore I am not permitted to divide the regulatory functions of the apostolic witness into more important global and less important personal bits. It would be a denial of my ordination vows.

Revd. Gill obviously has not spoken to some of "the others" in the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church. He speaks of a "retreat into their own comfort zone." That certainly is a misguided perception in my case. I am one of "the others", the Secretary of the Steering Committee that was charged with the establishment the Assembly of Confessing Congregations within the Uniting Church.

While my stand on the Basis of Union has not led to martyrdom yet, I had no option but to seek secular employment for 2006. In 2004 I received

theological considerations that need to be made on a number of levels, and how these considerations may be translated in the reality of everyday accountabilities and requirements.

The broader picture: UnitingCare Australia

The Uniting Church in Australia begins with a foundational statement that God is committed to life now, and thus sees itself as called to "preach Christ the crucified and risen one and confess him as Lord". It follows that the Uniting Church seeks to "bear witness to the unity of faith and life in Christ, rising above cultural, economic, national and racial boundaries to engage in fearless prophetic ministry in relation to social evils which deny God's active will for justice and peace".¹

These foundational statements are similarly reflected in the theological framework of UnitingCare Victoria and Tasmania, who immediately note that "Community services are one expression of the church's task or call to mission". This unique mission is "to provide the opportunity for reconciliation with God and therefore with one another and oneself—to be itself a sign of God's love and justice".

Of importance in this process is UnitingCare Australia's commitment to "continue to explore where the values of society overlap with those of our faith and where they are in

conflict. We need to consider the extent to which we can participate in society without being subsumed, and how we can stand apart without becoming irrelevant." In exploring how the mission of reconciliation is expressed through its agencies, UnitingCare's statement concedes that "The church, however, has often accepted the relegation of the spiritual to the private realm, and we have often seen a split between congregations at worship and agencies at mission".

"It is in being guided by this code of ethics that we can move forward with courage, where the cost of speaking prophetically may be a loss of funding for contracted services."

Perhaps it is this "split" that UnitingCare seeks to rectify through the pronouncement of faith as its number one value: "Seeking to share in the love and purpose of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, we strive to address injustice and to offer reconciliation and hope".²

In light of this desire to further bridge the gap between church and agency, the position and entity of UnitingCare agencies can be nothing other than as a natural extension of the body of the Uniting Church and UnitingCare network Australia wide.

What Does It Mean for a UnitingCare Agency to Express its Christian identity?

Cameron Burgess

THE QUESTION comes as church-based community services find themselves balancing a rich history of altruistic welfare provision, dating back to the 1840s, with the need to deliver high quality services on behalf of State and Federal Governments.

In the current climate of tendering, UnitingCare agencies find themselves providing services for State and Federal Government, with large percentages of income often originating from these two sources. With valuable social capital in the form of an altruistic, committed workforce along with a trusted name in the community, every indication is that UnitingCare agencies will continue to be a natural selection to provide community-based Government services.

Given UnitingCare's position of being a favoured organization through which government will deliver its services, the question must be asked: How do UnitingCare agencies define who we are in the context of a market economy, yet as part of the Church?

The delivery of services on behalf of government rightly requires an

imperative to exclude none by expressing an exclusive religious belief, and yet, UnitingCare agencies are informed by a Christian value system, and seek to outwork this in civil society.

The question therefore needs to be asked: Do agency values exist primarily to allow them to successfully tender in a competitive economic environment, or do our values act as a compass, pointing us back to our Christian origins as they navigate through the current economic mood of the day?

The answer to that question may well indicate whether our theology is driving our practice of applying for contracts, providing services, employing staff and strategic planning, or whether our theology is, at a later stage, simply attached to the actions agencies have been required to take in order to remain a viable contender in the delivery of services to the community.

Assuming that UnitingCare agencies' values do reflect the gospel, it is of importance to note that often the problem is not simply in affirming values, but understanding how to implement them in the complexity of the real world of organizational administration and service provision.

This discussion paper seeks to address the question of what it means for UnitingCare agencies to express their Christian identity. It seeks to open a conversation around the

anonymous threatening letters from someone with access to PRC business, and in 2005 I was excluded from future parish ministry for 2006 (and beyond?). It has been reported to me that a Presbytery Minister advised a Joint Nominating Committee, when my name was suggested, that he would not have me in his presbytery. False rumors were circulated in ACOMP that I would leave the UCA after the 2006 National Assembly. During all of 2006 I received not one invitation to a conversation to explore a call to a parish from ACOMP. The PRC who had pastoral responsibility for me in 2006 has not had one conversation with me yet. A change in chair and my prompting have led to a meeting with the PRC this year.

Therefore, the words of Tillich which Rowan Gill quotes, "You are accepted", have a hollow ring. These words seem, according to my experience, far from the hearts of the majority of our church leaders. Very few can even mention the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. I would therefore like to return Revd. Gill's assertion about me—but in order to give him some space, in the interrogative: "Who has retreated into their comfort zone?"

Walter Abetz



Action and Reflection

A Presentation to Maroondah Presbytery
Community Services Forum
14 September 2006

Barbara Gayler

LET ME BEGIN with a quote from Helder Camara:

Let every word be the fruit of action and reflection.

Reflection alone, without action or tending toward it is mere theory, adding its weight when we are overloaded with it already.

Action alone without reflection is being busy pointlessly...

Honour the Word eternal and speak to make a new world possible.¹

We are such a church for action! You only have to look at the vast range of community services provided throughout Australia by the Uniting



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Church to see how busy we are doing good works. Now it is good to be active, especially in the service of those in need, but sadly I see little evidence that the Uniting Church is interested in any serious reflection, at least not as far as theological rationale in the community services arena is concerned.

Certainly we can point to some rather thin theological statements which we claim underpin our work. But do such statements really inform our work? Or are they just a gloss written as an afterthought to the strategic plan and left to gather dust? If we were serious about it, surely agencies would be held to account as to how such statements are given effect in their work. More than this, one would expect church agencies to be resourced and supported in the important task of theological reflection on the work that they do.

This is especially important in today's political and funding climate. Many church people seem unaware of the major shift which occurred in the funding of welfare services over a generation ago. The experience of Wesley Mission is fairly typical. Up till the 1960s, the Mission's services were staffed by lay people, mostly without formal qualifications. They saw the work they did as their Christian vocation and worked long hours for little financial reward. As the professionalization of welfare services gathered pace by the early

1970s, the agencies began to accept substantial government funding to employ social workers and other trained staff to run their services. Today two thirds of the Mission's funding comes from government, and for many smaller agencies the dependency on government funding would be much higher. The staff are employed on the basis of merit rather than church commitment, and reflect the multi-faith nature of the wider community.

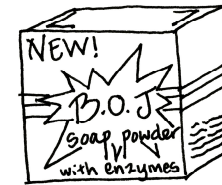
Given these circumstances, in what sense can any of our community service organizations still claim to be Christian?

There is no easy answer to this question. Nevertheless, I believe that wrestling with this issue is a central task for all faith-based agencies. Let me attempt an answer for Wesley Mission Melbourne.

The last line of the Helder Camara quote about reflection and action points to the sort of approach I find persuasive. The final words of that quote were, "speak to make a new world possible". To me, this is about imagining a world that is different. It is holding a vision which provides a genuine alternative to the current political and market realities. We have such a vision. For Christians, the vision that calls us forward is the coming reign of God which Jesus announced and embodied.

More than ever today, with the tendering of services and govern-

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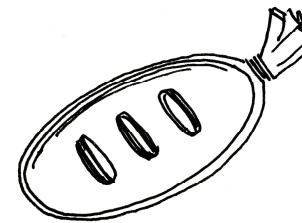
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H. HOWES 9/06

attitudinal change, there will not be the preconditions for the possibility of a “community of friends”, for which she yearns.

Our society has evolved into a nation of servants, a major economic contributor to the Gross Domestic Product. We have become an economy of servants. As a nation we could perhaps celebrate the institutionalization of the good servant! Would Christ, who had a tendency for getting things backwards, have rejected such a society of good servants? He might if he saw the good servants becoming lords of commercialized systems of service that actually control.

For people with disabilities, who have long been the recipients of Christian community services, and who often have little opportunity to influence the priorities of such services, there lies the hope and possibility of a different way forward. The possibility of friendship becoming a more dominant paradigm within the minds of planners who are responsible for the directions and visions of our community service agencies, organizations and parishes. Friends are people who understand that it is not the servants—lawyers, social workers, clergy, teachers, doctors—who are in control of God’s world. Rather, friends are people who understand that it is through their mutual action and enjoyment of each other’s company that Christ’s call for

equality is realized. Why friends rather than servants? Maybe because Christ knew that servants could always become lords but that friends could not. It is very possible for a servant to exercise control over those to whom they are entrusted to care or to give “help”. Friends however, do not need the call to be backward. They are free to give and receive help, and are liberated by the possibilities of knowing how to help each other.

ANDY CALDER is a Chaplain at Epworth Hospital in Richmond.

Notes

¹B. Gaventa, “Gift and Call: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Friendships” in *Friendships and Community Connections between People with and without Developmental Disabilities*, ed. A. N. Amado (Maryland: Brookes, 1993) 43.

²P. J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Indiana: U. Notre Dame P., 1989) 70.

³J. Moltmann, *The Open Church* (London: SCM, 1978) 55-6.

⁴Moltmann, 57.

⁵M. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (NY: Crossroad, 1991) 18-19.

⁶Gaventa, 45-6.

⁷Hunt, 162-4.

Acknowledgments also to John McKnight, *On the Backwardness of Prophets* (source unknown).

ments increasingly prescriptive about the way those services are to be delivered, we are in grave danger of losing our way unless we hold a different perception of reality—an alternative vision which sustains and inspires us and spurs us to action. We are all open to being seduced by the dollars on offer and having our priorities set for us, unless we have a very clear sense of who we are (and whose we are), and why we do what we do.

Each month at Wesley Mission we run an induction day for new staff, some of whom are honest enough to admit that they are unaware they are joining a church organization. In welcoming them to Wesley, I address the issue of what it might mean that we are a Christian organization. It is not easy to explain the concept of “the kingdom of God” to those who have never heard the term, but I do my best. I conclude by telling these new staff that the church is meant to live in a way which is a sign of the coming reign of God—and that is why the church is involved in providing services for those in need and working for justice.

When I joined Wesley as the first Minister to the Mission almost four years ago (post the well-publicized crisis and subsequent major re-organization), a strategic plan for the next three years had just been developed. I was dismayed when I read the list of eight values it contained. To me they spoke not of the gospel, but of managerialism.

However, three years down the track, when it came time to develop our current strategic plan, it was agreed that I would convene a small working group of senior staff to propose a new statement of our vision and values. As a result of this work, the new values of Wesley Mission are justice, compassion and hope. You may think that a new statement of values is simply window dressing, but this would be to seriously underestimate the opportunities presented by the adoption of a very simple set of values which line up with core Christian values. The Christian tradition has plenty to say about each of the values we chose, and we are already starting to draw on these resources as we work with them.

We have chosen the first of these values—justice—as the theme of this year’s annual report. For our annual meeting to report to the community, we have been very deliberate in our choice of guest speaker. Instead of hunting for a suitable celebrity to talk about his or her area of interest, we sought a speaker who would have something to say about what it means to work for justice in the context of Wesley Mission Melbourne. Over the next year, as I visit our programs I am planning to initiate conversation with staff about what it means to work for justice in their particular situation. I have already used the Helder Camara quote as a source of reflection at our recent executive retreat, and will be

on the lookout for inspiring stories about working for justice as a source of reflection at other meetings of the Mission leadership over the next year. In years two and three I expect we will focus more on the other values of compassion and hope.

All this gives some idea of the potential and the importance of agencies articulating their vision and naming appropriate values.

In Christian community service agencies we need people whose responsibility it is to raise questions about agency direction from a perspective of Christian faith. A designated Agency Minister or Director of Mission can raise such issues and hold the organization accountable to its Christian values base. Sadly, most Uniting Church agencies do not have Agency Ministers, and those that do often locate them in a place on the organizational chart where they are unable to influence key decisions about agency direction.

This is not chaplaincy! Chaplaincy is important, but it is different. To offer effective pastoral care, especially to staff at the coal face, it is a liability to be too closely aligned with the decision makers at the centre of power. Ideally a pastoral carer is located alongside those for whom one has pastoral responsibility, and such a person should not hold decision-making power in the organization. (Think of the military services—

although chaplains are given rank, it would be a complete conflict of interest for chaplains to be involved in decisions about military strategy and deployment of troops.)

My role at Wesley Mission would have developed very differently if I were not part of the executive team and, together with the CEO, a non-voting member of the Board.

Those who are ordained by the church to the Ministry of the Word and the Diaconate are charged with special responsibility for upholding the apostolic faith. Ministers of the Word in particular are the guardians of right teaching, and Deacons of right praxis.

An important aspect of my role as Minister to the Mission at Wesley is to guard and promote the Christian identity of the organization. It would not be possible to exercise this responsibility if the position of Minister to the Mission were not located within the Mission's leadership.

At this forum, we have been asked to respond to two questions:

How does being a faith-based agency affect what we do and how we do it?

How do we maintain our Christian identity in today's political and funding climate?

To summarize from the perspective of Wesley Mission, I would say that our approach for the present time is to have a full-time minister in placement at the Mission. That Minis-

Hunt seeks a world in which the phrase, "just friends", will be shorthand for the fact that friendship is the pinnacle of human relating.

In classic traditions, friendship was a great gift and treasure, and that it was a human pathway to the divine. In the biblical tradition friendship reveals the grace, love and call of a caring God. Friendships are one of the expressions of God's grace, a grace that compels the reciprocal actions of both loving God, and loving God through the love of others. Beverly Gaventa asserts that there are also similarities between the classical and biblical traditions, because the spiritual views of friendship in the biblical tradition also describe the experience of friendship as treasure and moral imperative. She believes that friendship needs to be understood in the context of both gift and call.

Gift and call. Do we have eyes to see and ears to hear? Are our formal systems of care and service delivery able to respond in such a way that we move beyond "professional friendships" which are determined by the timetable of the professional? Granted, there is the tension of maintaining a high standard of proficiency in a highly competitive funding environment. In such a climate, outcome-driven funding guidelines rarely enable staff to facilitate and encourage informal relationships which are mutual and develop a commitment of giving and receiving.

Service can easily become identified with the delivering of services, perpetuating the belief that professionalism is the pinnacle of how we go about our business.

In shifting the emphasis from service to friendship, I think Jesus was pointing to a different way of

" Within the institutional church and its hierarchy, friendship and justice for people with disabilities is infrequently found. "

operating. Unfortunately this approach is often considered to be unprofessional. Christ's backwards model of service seeks an equality based on the mutuality of friendship. Such an equality strikes at the heart of the biblical tradition, which cries out for justice. Justice for people with disabilities is an ongoing struggle for acceptance, and for the fruits of a society which many people take for granted. It often seems to be an overwhelming struggle, with many frustrations along the way. Hunt's critique is relevant here, when she writes of friendship, "within the feminist perspective it means attention, generativity and community building all aimed at justice". Within the institutional church and its hierarchy, friendship and justice for people with disabilities is infrequently found. Without ongoing structural and

natural basis for all positive social relationships, in that it stressed mutual attraction and respect. It was a male prerogative, and in its most pure form was expressed in the relationship of the philosopher and pupil. *Philos* may have had sexual elements, but it was not primarily sexual love, or *eros*. In *agape*, we see an inclusive, universal love that goes out to anyone regardless of whether that love is returned, and regardless of whether we find that person easy to love or not. Friendship has not always sat snugly at home in the Christian world, because it has had a difficult time justifying itself as Christian love.

In the New Testament Jesus is referred to as a 'friend' on two occasions; these two places, however, are most important to the message of Jesus. In Luke's gospel we read:

The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say "Behold a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!". (Luke 7:34)

Jürgen Moltmann believes that the inner motivations for this striking friendship with people considered "beyond the pale" lies in Jesus' celebration of the messianic feast of God's kingdom every time he eats and drinks with them. In combining affection and respect, he becomes their friend because of his joy in their common freedom—God's future.

In John's gospel we read:

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends. (John 15:13-15)

Here the sacrifice of one's life is the highest form of love, which manifests itself as friendship. The switch from being servants to friends is most significant for the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Moltmann believes that in the fellowship of Jesus they now experience him in his innermost nature as Friend. Open friendship now becomes the bond in their fellowship and, most significantly, becomes their vocation in a society still dominated by relationships of masters and servants.

Mary Hunt asserts that within the Christian tradition, friendship is often based on the mutual search for justice. This is what the Christian community has historically done well, and needs to be more strongly claimed. For many people friendship replaces family and marriage as the primary point of reference. Hunt takes a radical stand, in that she goes so far as to suggest friendship to be sacramental, and develops a case for friendship to be the relational norm within the Christian community. In particular,

ter has a mandate to work within the Mission to uphold and promote the organization's Christian identity. In order to exercise that responsibility effectively, the Minister to the Mission is located at the level of the organization where all the important decisions concerning missional direction are made. This is neither the complete answer nor the only answer. I look forward to hearing what other agencies are doing to address these crucial issues.

For faith-based agencies, the biggest threat we all face in today's

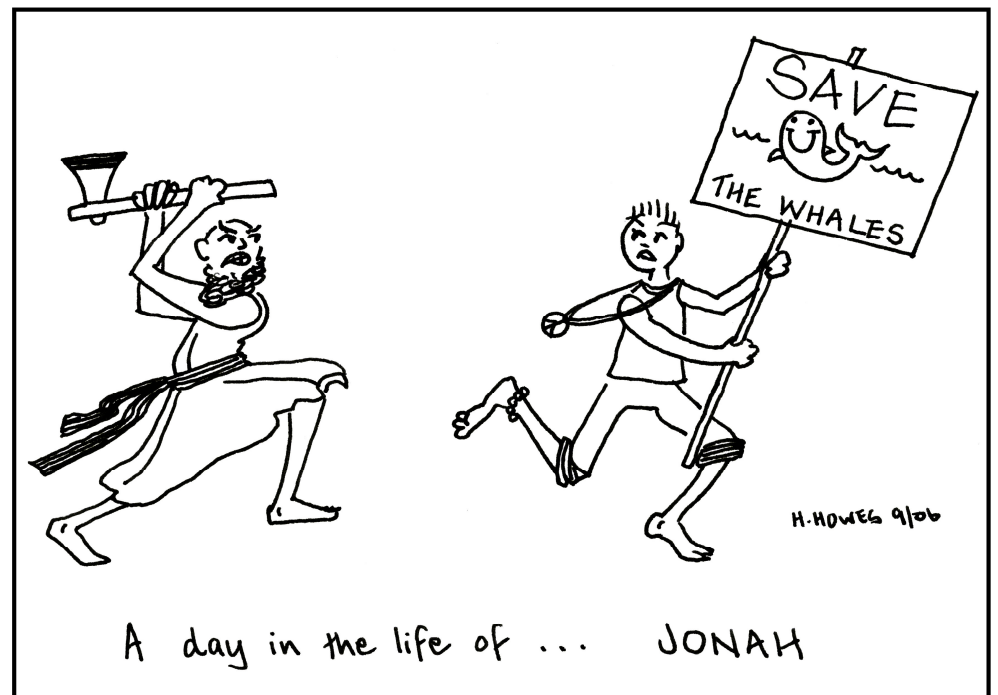
political and funding climate is homogenization. If we do not have a clear sense of who we are and why we do what we do, we will soon find ourselves stripped of any sense of distinctive identity, and simply become another service provider acting on government's behalf.

BARBARA GAYLER is Minister to the Mission at Wesley Mission, Melbourne.

¹Helder Camara, *The Desert is Fertile* (New York: Orbis, 1974) 57-8.

Double Take

by Hilary Howes



Hope, Belonging, Connection and the Future

James Haire

IF WE LOOK at the words of this title, the fundamental issue is one of identity. If we are not clear about our identity, then these grand words about “hope, belonging, connection and the future” are empty. In the Uniting Church and its service networks, our identity is that we are Christian. That is not an arrogant statement. It simply means that we are the ones who bear the name of Christ upon ourselves.

As the bearers of Christ’s name, we identify ourselves with the very particular actions of God in the history of Israel and then, most especially, with Jesus of Nazareth. It is his name that we bear upon ourselves. Christians are adopted into the covenantal action of God with Israel and with Jesus. It is from that particular place, and from within that particular theological framework, that we receive both our identity as Christians and our mission in the world. In all our activities, we live from the power of the living Jesus, who is present to us in the mission of the Spirit, sent out from the Father

and the Son to renew the whole creation. Bearing Christ’s name means that we belong to this renewing and transforming God. We are who we are because God has claimed and redeemed us in Christ. It is this that gives us security and hope and meaning. Nothing more, nothing less.

That identity drives our concern for community services. It is very important for us to realize this. We humbly offer what we are and what we have in Christ, nothing more. What happens, then, when cultures and fashions are not so favourable to Christianity, as is the case in the West at present? In other parts of the world, say the two-thirds world, conditions are favourable for the flourishing of Christianity. In our own situation, Christians may be tempted to use our community service work as a security blanket to insulate ourselves against these unfavourable conditions. “Look,” we could say, “our numbers at worship are declining, but we’ve

On Areopagus Hill



From Servants to Friends

The Call to be Backward

A Different Paradigm for UnitingCare?

Andy Calder

NATIONALLY, our systems of care have evolved into a complex and professionalized service delivery industry. Within this realm, with its myriad of programs and services, the Uniting Church in Australia is a significant contributor. For Uniting Church agencies, congregations and organizations, our distinct call continues to be that of service; for people isolated by poverty, stigma, homelessness, disability there is the risk however that in the name of service we may perpetuate systems of lordship instead of heeding the cry for friendship and the encouragement of community and interdependence. How do we respond to Christ’s call to be friends, when so often we find ourselves in the role of being professional servants? Have we got it all backwards? This article will focus on the needs of people with disabilities, but the issues raised have broad application.

Friendships with people with disabilities will challenge and invite

the church and its community service agencies to look afresh at its understanding of vulnerability as a living sign of Christ’s presence. What sort of welcome is on offer? Is it one of toleration which often has paternalism as a corollary? It is to be hoped that it is a genuinely open invitation to participate in communities where the gifts and graces of all people are discovered and celebrated.

This article contends the need for a shift in emphasis from service to friendship: believing that strangers can indeed be our friends; that people we may never have expected to, could become our friends. Some theological underpinnings of friendship will be followed by an exploration of the practical application of that within the systems of our Church’s community services.

Writings on the topic of friendship are relatively sparse. It is speculated that the concept of friendship has been subsumed, particularly in Christendom, within the discussion of love and relationships, both divine and human. For our purposes, friendship is defined as “a relationship characterized by mutual enjoyment, reciprocity and acceptance, in contrast to relationships in which a person is continually a ‘client’ or ‘consumer’ and constantly being treated, programmed or fixed”.

In the Greco-Roman world, friendship was viewed as a form of love, called *philos*, and was regarded as the

their sleeves is a continuing sectarianism within the services sector.

How do we live out our discipleship in community services? This has always been difficult for Christianity because Christianity began as a persecuted minority within a persecuted minority. That is, Christianity existed within Judaism, which existed within the Roman Empire. So how do you use the foundational documents of a vulnerable, persecuted community for the formation of social policy after you have become the dominant force in Western culture, the majority religion in Australia, and the major provider of community services? A number of things become important.

Macro ethics, as against micro ethics, becomes quite vital. Micro ethics is the latest fad, of course: local and particular codes of ethics for how you behave towards each other. But big picture notions of ethics then exist only in an ahistorical vacuum and are constantly up for grabs. Micro ethics in the community services sector focus only on *techniques* or styles of delivery, rather than upon the substance of what *ought* to be delivered. The macro ethics of the kingdom of God should be constantly in the minds of those who manage our services. William Temple spoke about bi-focal vision: one eye of the kingdom and another on the world. Alan Walker kept his kingdom critique going even to the point of alienating people over anti-nuclear

policy in the 1950s. The politics of Jesus and the apostolic communities have to be constantly in front of us as we make day-to-day decisions.

We also have responsibility to actually *shape* government policy. When you become large, as indeed we are right now, you can take part in the shaping of policy. And despite everything that is said, life in the church is about far more than government policy. Whole areas of life, possibly even the most important parts of life, are not in fact regulated by the state. You can't legislate in any comprehensive, totalizing, way for grace, hope, or love. Does your organization run "by the book" or by the grace communicated in the sacred book?

In the end, our identity is in Christ, not in ourselves. This requires us to approach what we do with a great measure of humility. Personally I find community services managers to be some of the most egotistical people I have met, far more egotistical than industrial managers. But who was the greatest community services provider in the last 100 years? Mother Theresa, and even she did not escape arrogance.

So beware and be on about policy!

JAMES HAIRE is Professor of Theology at Charles Sturt University, and a former President of the Uniting Church. This paper has been edited from an address given to the UnitingCare national conference in Brisbane last year.

got our logo all over the place, so all is well." That temptation should be resisted because so to do and say would fundamentally deny that our real security is to be found in Christ alone. A more faithful response would be to say: "We will continue to live and proclaim the gospel of Christ as we have always done, and we shall engage in community services because it is precisely the gospel that requires us to do so."

A little bit of history. Christianity has always had a concern for community services. In fact, it inherited this from Judaism. Judaism cared for the widow and the orphan. And it believed that if it did not care for the widow and the orphan the worship of God was meaningless. Then there was the Year of Jubilee. After 49 years all property was to revert to the original owner so that people could start again. The rich could not become too rich, and the poor could not become too poor. At best, you could only be a capitalist for 49 years! The other Abrahamic faith, Islam, also has had a long history of community services. Alms for the poor and a ban on usury. No interest on loans. Muslims who come to Australia take out housing loans from their own community at no interest rate.

Let me tell you about St. Laurence. When the barbarians attacked northern Italy, they demanded the church's jewels. St. Laurence came out with the poor, widows, and the

orphans and said that these humble people of God were the real jewels of the church.

In the Middle Ages, it should be remembered, the church was not just the welfare state, but also the first trans-national corporation with decent industrial relations policies (no work on Sunday) and a sense of the common good. The church banned usury and running community centres, because church buildings were already multi-purpose community centres. The church was also the biggest employer.

This did not mean, however, that the church became involved in absolutely every kind of activity that might be construed as a "service" in the wider community. In fact, the church has always been very clear about what it will, and will not, do. Some kinds of "service" the church does not regard as ultimately either helpful or hopeful. A peculiarly Christian medical ethics, for example, resisted the prevailing philosophy of the 2nd-century Greco-Roman world and became a formative source for the practice of healing for all that followed in Western medicine. The view that medical ethics should not be derived from commercial or political interests but related to a wider sense of care for the whole person in their communities, eventually became the dominant view. Late modernity has, of course, brought all of that into question again. It is no longer taken for

granted that medical ethics should have its foundation in the notion of a God who heals, and who calls doctors to heal through a holistic sense of care for the total well-being of a patient in their communal setting. Today some doctors are arguing that it is OK to kill their patients. Some are arguing that some patients should not be treated because it is too expensive to do so.

In more recent history, if we turn our minds towards the traditions that formed the Uniting Church, it is clear that British Methodism, Congregationalism, and Presbyterianism all inherited the church's involvement in community services. Let us note, however, that their understandings of community service had a particular profile, and that this was eventually transported to Australia.

All three denominations tended, initially, to be tribal. Methodism grew in Western and Northern England. The Presbyterians dominated Scotland and Northern Ireland. Congregationalism was strong in England and Wales. After coming to Australia, each denomination tended, at the beginning, to look after only their own. They nevertheless very quickly went much further than their own, believing that assistance should be offered on the basis of need, rather than creed. Methodism became the most active in this sense. With a very efficient centralized organization it was able to care for many people. From the beginning, Methodism also critiqued

government policy. Alan Walker and the Melbourne Central Methodist Mission were particularly influential. However, even here, there was a tension between the rhetoric and the practice. The rhetoric critiqued capitalism as a system, but the practice depended upon capitalism for funding.

Congregationalism and Presbyterianism also had internal tensions. Presbyterianism, especially, tended to more associated with the establishment. Theologically, however, it was strongly anti-Erastian, preaching that the church should never align itself with any state in the way that Anglicans and Lutherans have done. Therefore there were elements within Congregational and Presbyterian practice that were strongly critical of the church becoming too involved with the state in the service of the general community. After all, these were the people that emerged from the English Civil War. They wanted to overthrow and reform the whole of society, and to reform it according to their own moral code: theocrats wanting to apply the rule of God—anti-democrat.

What has evolved? In Britain, with the advent of the welfare state, the churches handed over many of their institutions to the state in 1945. In England, Catholics were a minority. The Presbyterians and Anglicans went ahead with the handover and the Catholics eventually did the same. In

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 14)

Australia this did not happen because of sectarianism. The Roman church refused to enter any such concordat, and Protestants feared they would go under. This sectarianism (anti-ecumenism) combined with government decentralization—the two accidents of sectarianism and governments wanting to off load their responsibilities—led in Australia to the creation of enormous agencies operated by church-based social workers. One million Australians now pass through our doors every week.

What do we do in this situation? There are dangers in taking the “queen’s shilling” or state funding. What are they?

1. “Mission reformulation”: re-interpreting the mission of church every so often, simply to fit in with government policy. “Mission creep”: allowing our churchly identity to be shaped by the government of the day and employ people who are good at getting the money according to the criteria of the state. This danger is a form of Erastianism, where the will of God is closely identified with that of the state.

2. “Hyper regulation”: the public purse demands accountability, so the church employs an army of bureaucrats to ensure compliance. This quickly becomes an end in itself. The mission slowly begins to operate for sake of the managers rather than the clients. This critique comes from the

right wing of the political spectrum. Certain elements of the right do not want the churches involved in community services for the sake of the churches.

3. “Responsibility gap” or *lacuna*: if something goes wrong the government or the state is never to blame, because the state is not directly involved in service delivery. In this situation, because the state has absolute power over what might be construed as “good” or “bad” service, it can remove funding as a way of ensuring that critiques of its policies never become too trenchant.

So what can church agencies and missions do to protect themselves from these dangers?

1. They should learn from the way in which church schools get money from the state. Schools tell the state they shall be doing things their way and that the state can they decide whether it wants to support them or not. The state then has to support them or face community outrage.

2. Always say “invited” by the state to do these things.

3. The churches should seek to act ecumenically wherever possible. The state will find itself in a very difficult position if *all of us* refuse to play ball on a particular issue. The state’s policy of putting services out for competitive tendering is a method of preventing this cooperation. Despite the ecumenical movement and its successes, the one card states have up

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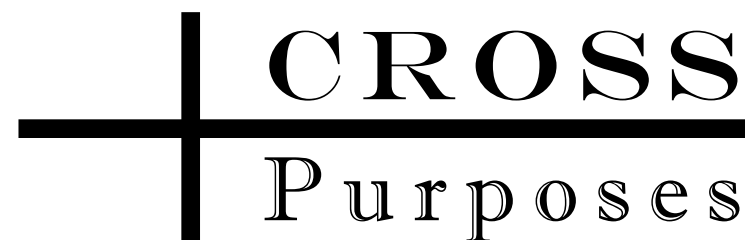
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