



Newsletter of
St Luke's Uniting Church

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THE MESSENGER

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Minister's Message

Sofia – Woman Wisdom

You may remember a while back I preached on Proverbs 8, in which Wisdom is portrayed as both a co-creator with God and as a woman who offers a feast of counsel to any who would come to her. One of the important elements of this portrayal that I highlighted is that in the Biblical text, God's co-creator is female. While the status of women in Biblical times was in many ways far lower than that of men, this portrayal of a female divine figure in Proverbs 8 radically includes women in the image, power and action of God. Woman wisdom is God's first creation, God's companion – a 'master worker' alongside God.

Despite being bookended by chapters that depict the loose and the foolish woman, the passage in Proverbs 8 stands as a witness against the many and varied ways that the church and our society have sought to deny women's equality, and the ways in which the church, particularly after Augustine, has sought to deny the inclusion of the feminine in God. Mary Daly, in her book 'Beyond God the Father', wrote 'If God is male, then the male is God'. Her argument was that the Judeo-Christian tradition's view of God as male gave rise to the Patriarchal society in which we live and under which countless women have suffered and continue to suffer, and that the only ethical response was to reject all Judeo-Christian religious traditions as inherently unworthy. While there are examples of patriarchal cultures that have not been informed by Judeo-Christian traditions, and while it can be reasonably argued that God has consistently been understood in the Judeo-Christian tradition as being beyond gender, it's hard to argue that consistently calling God Him and He, Father and Son, doesn't influence our conception of God.

As much as I love William Blake's evocative and mystical religious art, in his illustrations God is always male (with a long, flowing beard to boot), and Blake is by no means the only influential artist to portray God in such ways (Sistine Chapel, anyone?).

In this context, the idea of woman Wisdom as the Holy Spirit offers some redemption for our image of God and our understanding of human beings as reflecting that image. If God is not just He, but also She, or even if God is neither she nor he, then equality is built into the very core of who we are as children of God, and should also be built into the core of who we are as a society. Our capacity as the church to recognise that this should be so but still isn't, is key to living out the good news we are called to proclaim and enact.

Recently, the Rev. Sally Douglas (no relation), launched her first book – 'Early Church Understandings of Jesus as the Female Divine – The Scandal of the Scandal of Particularity'. At the Synod meeting Sally presented the daily Bible study, which drew on this rather scholarly book, but which Sally made vibrant with her presence and passion. Central to the studies was Sally's thesis that the early church identified Jesus as the embodiment of woman Wisdom. Drawing on the Proverbs 8 text, the prologue of John's gospel, scraps of hymns and liturgy found in the letters of Paul, words of Jesus in the gospels, and wisdom literature such as Tobit and the book of Wisdom, Sally very convincingly showed us that the early church thought of Jesus as the embodiment of Wisdom, the female Divine, and that both male and female members of the early church were comfortable with such an understanding, despite how uncomfortably it may sit with prevailing pictures of who Jesus was and is. The early church had this understanding not because they were rampant feminists determined to see a man as

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a woman, but because their experience of encountering Jesus resonated with descriptions in Scripture of encountering woman Wisdom. Having eyes opened; seeing the light; gaining new understanding and experiencing it as like receiving bread and wine – these experiences led the earliest Christians to take the image of the female Divine already present in Jewish tradition and identify Jesus with that image.

As a result of these studies I'm revisiting my previous proclamation which placed woman Wisdom as the Holy Spirit, and inviting myself and anyone who cares to join me to look anew at Jesus, who wants to gather Jerusalem like a mother hen gathers her chicks; who tells us Wisdom is vindicated by her children; who the early church identified as Wisdom, and think through what it might mean for us.

James Douglas

From the Church Council

*'Ideas won't keep,
something must be done about them.'*

Alfred North Whitehead

During the Church Council retreat in April, the Church Councillors discussed the St Luke's activities, programs and the positives in our community. We realised that ideas and suggestions are being implemented and developed continually. These have resulted in some challenges, and very worthwhile happenings.

Some of these are being driven by our Ministry Groups; in particular Adult Growth and Development, Social Justice and Community Activities and involve members from our neighbouring Uniting Churches in the Cluster group.

Future events to be noted are:

- Dinner groups with members of the Muslim faith to enable better understanding between us.
- Our elections for Church Councillors and other positions of responsibility to be held on 3 July, and a big thank you is extended to all present Church Councillors and members of the various ministry groups. Every one adds to the life of St Luke's and makes this a very cohesive place.

We all appreciate the new revitalised Hall 3, after the new paint work – thank you to the Property group. (We hear the roof of our Preschool and Halls is looking resplendent after its paint work, too. It's too high to inspect!)

The recent Visitation Sunday was very successful, thanks to Helen Haysom for coordinating this. The members who travelled to nearby congregations brought back positive comments.

We continue to be blessed with the ministry of James and Corrie, and thank them for their care and leadership; and pray God's blessing on them and their families.

Eunice Magee

Synod Meeting Round-up

I recently attended the 2016 meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, held in Box Hill Town Hall between the 3rd and 8th of June. What happened? I'm glad you asked!

At the opening service, the Rev. Sharon Hollis was installed as Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Sharon will serve as Moderator for three years, including two Synod meetings (which occur every eighteen months). Sharon has been interviewed on ABC and a more fulsome interview with her is in the June Crosslight magazine.

The most anticipated piece of business was the final report and recommendations of the Major Strategic Review (MSR). The report summarises more than two years of work by the MSR team with a substantial cross-section of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania, covering the work of congregations, chaplains, agencies, schools, Synod operations, the Commission for Mission, the Centre for Theology and Ministry/Pilgrim Theological College, BOMAR, and any other element of the Synod's life they could interact with. As you'd expect from such a wide-ranging review, the Report was extensive, coming in at over 75 pages, and the recommendations were substantial. Some had already been enacted by Standing Committee before the Synod meeting, while others were approved by those at the Synod meeting. Major changes include:

- The adoption of a set of Vision and Mission Principles to guide the activities and decision making of the Synod over the next 3–5 years.
- The formation of the Uniting Care Agency Board, which will assume governance and compliance responsibility from the numerous boards of Uniting Care agencies across Victoria and Tasmania, and act as a single point of contact for government, in a similar way to the Uniting Aged Care Board.
- A range of initiatives to reduce costs as well as to increase income, with a target of a balanced Synod budget by 2019.
- The areas of responsibility currently covered by the boards of the Centre for Theology and Ministry and the Commission for Mission, as well as the Board of Mission and Resourcing (BOMAR) to be incorporated into two committees of the Standing Committee.
- The reorganisation of Synod based ministries and operations into four key areas:
 - * A Mission and Capacity Building Unit
 - * A Mission and Ministry Support Unit
 - * A Mission Resourcing Unit
 - * An Office of the General Secretary

- A review of the resourcing of Presbyteries and the relationship between Presbyteries and Synod, with a team to implement the review.

One of the strong themes of the MSR report was building capacity in the Church – focussing on equipping the Synod (through agencies, schools, presbyteries and congregations) to explore and enact new ways to engage with the community, share faith, gather in worship, proclaim God's solidarity with the suffering, and nurture relationships across generations. Interestingly, these themes echo much of what our Church Council has been reflecting on in seeking to shape St Luke's future.

There were a number of other issues debated over the five days of the Synod, including the duration of the Synod meeting, as well as ways to better include younger people. We also heard and saw reports from Uniting Agewell, the Commission for Mission, the Centre for Theology and Ministry, the Board of Mission and Resourcing, the Risk Management Committee, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (both Victoria and Tasmania), the Assembly, and a number of videos from the Communications Unit about what's happening in congregations, agencies and schools around the Synod.

One final aspect of the Synod meeting which I shared recently with the fun@five parents was the way the meeting makes decisions. With 300 members of the meeting, the potential exists for decisions to go the way of the loudest and most loquacious speakers, with anyone in the minority left feeling unheard. However, the consensus decision-making procedures used at Synod allow for far more discernment together, and the card system used for indicating the meeting's response to a proposal is simply genius. For those who don't know about it, ask me, or Gavin Faichney, about it sometime – it's vastly better than any hand-raising system, even hands on heads! Using this consensus system, the many major decisions of the Synod meeting were resolved almost entirely by consensus (everyone being warm to the proposal going ahead), and where there were people cool to the proposal in question, their voices were heard, and they were able to have their opposition recognised in the type of decision recorded (agreement rather than consensus). It may not sound like much, but I see it as a way in which the Uniting Church seeks to bring God's grace into every aspect of the Church's life. If you'd like to know more about the Synod meeting, you can find information on the Synod website, or you can ask me for more details.

James

More OBE's at St Luke's

Four members of St Luke's have celebrated this special occasion recently. Our congratulations to John McArthur, Edna Deans, Clair Kendall and Jim Roffey. We wish you all many blessings in the future.



Tuesday Circle

Tuesday Circle held a Cancer Morning Tea recently. Members enjoyed morning tea with stories and laughs, and raised over \$270 for cancer research.



Twenty Years Working for Aunty (the ABC)

During my earliest days working on the switchboard at ABC TV from 1976, the most popular program was Countdown. I was able to get free tickets for the show for my friends' children and they still remember that. The television 'cords and plugs' switchboard was the last one used in Melbourne and it is now in the archives at Hawthorn.

I moved to the city to work for Radio 3LO and 3AR where I used the early versions of a computerised switchboard. I remember the sports commentator Joe O'Brien teaching Greg Miles the technique of race calling. Greg was very nervous and I was able to calm him down before his first race call. In later years (when Greg had been awarded the OAM) he remembered me from that time.

During the Federal elections many people would ring in to air their opinions after a broadcast by one of the politicians, many callers were very abusive. I had to record all the calls – it was chaotic. I rang the girl at Ripponlea (TV) to see how she was coping and I heard her voice (but somewhat deeper) pretending that she was a recorded message. *This is a recorded message, the station is closed, please call back after 8 am tomorrow.*

On Saturday mornings Dr Hugh Wirth, director of the RSPCA, would broadcast and take listeners' calls. He was quite rude, especially to children. After the session he would come to me and ask: 'How many did I upset today?' Clearly he loved animals but not people.

Every day was different. The sports commentators were my favourites. They came into the switch room to get their equipment for their outside broadcasts and we became life-long friends.

One of my favourite people was Ian MacNamara (Macca) of *Australia All Over*. He would be on air from 5 am to 10 am.

One day he signed off feeling very tired when he noticed that I had received another call from a listener ringing in from a ship. Ian took the call knowing that it was important for the listener. This was an example of his professionalism and how caring he was of people.

In 1963 I moved to Radio Australia into their new headquarters in Mount Waverley. It was the first multi-cultural organisation in Australia. I was privileged to be the first person the caller would speak to in Australia. I learned the word for *hello* in many languages so as soon as a call would come through I called the staff member from that country. Our overseas reporters were relieved when they heard my voice and I became a 'mother hen' figure to them. They often experienced difficulties with their communications during troubled political situations.

Radio Australia conducted English classes on air which was a wonderful opportunity for people in south-east Asia to learn English. When I went to Bali I met people who had benefited from that scheme and they held Radio Australia in high regard.

We had a great social life there – Saturday night dinners featuring international foods, each one outdoing the other. We were a tightly knit group, all the more significant as we came from many countries and walks of life. After thirty years about forty of us still meet for lunch once per year.

An additional job that I undertook was to manage the staff Credit Union. When my daughter was asked what her mother did – Wendy proudly replied that her mother was in communications and finance.

These are some of my fondest memories as a switchboard operator spanning the years 1950 to 2002.

Yvonne Stent



'Macca', Yvonne, Denis Gibbons and Leah (Producer of Australia All Over) in background

Trip to King Island

Early this year I was delighted to join Barbara Fowler, Lois Longthorp and Rennus Crossley on a three-day holiday package trip to King Island. At the airport we picked up our car and were given pamphlets, helpful suggestions and useful information before driving to the township of Grassy in the south of the island and our very comfortable accommodation.

We enjoyed three very full days and beautiful weather. The only lack was enough time to see and do all that we would have liked. Below are some of the things we saw and did.

Native fauna included wallabies first and foremost. They were everywhere in town and out, and sadly frequently dead on the roads. More positively there were lots of blue wrens and their mates and carolling magpies, black swans, waders and of course seagulls.

The kelp industry is an important one with processed kelp exported world-over, including Scotland! and used in a huge range of products from food to pharmaceuticals, industrial applications and hand-crafted souvenirs. We visited the processing factory and a little shop where we saw the leather-like kelp manipulated and sewn into a beautiful range of bush and sea souvenirs. We all succumbed to temptation – I now have a little sea horse on my frig.

We went north to see Cape Wickham Lighthouse, built in 1861 of local granite and the tallest lighthouse in Australia, and just up from the golf course which runs down to the sea. Fairly breezy! Absolutely glorious scenery all around as well as a small area of grave sites of ship wreck victims from the Neva and Loch Leven.

We enjoyed a picnic at Yellow Rock River and beach – picnic hampers courtesy of our holiday package – lovely – as was our welcoming large cheese platter of King Island cheeses and biscuits. Yum!! Also included was a complimentary dinner at top class 'Wild Harvest' restaurant. A great meal apart from the abalone, kelp custard and samphire entrée we tried. Also worth mentioning is the good coffee available everywhere we had a coffee stop!

Currie, the 'capital', about midway in the island, includes a dress shop we were drawn to several times, an op shop, and bakery and coffee shop! The main attraction is the museum, where we could have enjoyed a few more wanders around the wide range of exhibits, many with fascinating stories behind them. The island is known as the shipwreck island with good reason, and the museum has the original magnificent light from Cape Wickham light house.

We also went south and had a lovely walk to the petrified forest – quite fascinating – and our last visit was to the cheese factory....aaah!! well!!

We had a lovely three days and we all felt it a holiday destination to be heartily recommended.

Rena Douglas



Little Things Mean a Lot

It is interesting to know that people who saved stamps for Sammy the Stamp, or Sammy's Flippers, raised \$41,458.96 for the year 2015. This money has been distributed to worthy charities or organisations.

Also, the shoe boxes and greeting cards that we collect for the Samaritan's Purse are used for needy children in Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Fiji and Vanuatu. These boxes are filled with something to love, something to wear, something for school, something to play with, something for personal hygiene and something special. They send 15,000 boxes each year.

So keep up the good work and save stamps, shoe boxes, greeting cards, and each February and September there will be a collection at church.

Little things do mean a lot.

Thank you and God bless.

Aldyth Williams

2015 - A Pleasing Year for Sammy Stamp

Grants approved during 2015 totalling \$38,500 (last year \$46,248):

<i>Wandin/Seville UC - to assist in completing water project at the Matthew Rusike Children's Home, Zimbabwe.</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>
<i>Healesville UC - to supply clean water, Kariakomo Orphanage and Primary School, Kenya</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>
<i>The Vanuatu Prevention of Blindness Project</i>	<i>\$1,000</i>
<i>Echuca/Moama UC - assisting the Breakfast and Lunch Programme</i>	<i>\$2,500</i>
<i>SHARE Vanuatu Cyclone Appeal</i>	<i>\$5,000</i>
<i>Swan Hill UC - to assist their programme to help asylum seekers and refugees living in their community</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>
<i>SHARE National Cyclone Appeal</i>	<i>\$2,000</i>
<i>Mission Liaison Group - to assist in transporting charitable goods overseas</i>	<i>\$2,000</i>
<i>Uniting World Nepal Earthquake Appeal</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>
<i>The High Street Frankston UC - to assist in their support of Mother and Baby Health Clinics Project in North India</i>	<i>\$2,000</i>
<i>St Margaret's UC Mooroolbark - for continued support of Rubaga Youth Development Association's Vocational Training College, Kampala, Uganda, to repair damaged kitchen and towards completion of a new boy's dormitory</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>
<i>SHARE Syrian Refugee Appeal</i>	<i>\$2,000</i>
<i>Uniting World Famine in Papua New Guinea Appeal</i>	<i>\$3,000</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$38,500</i>

Total of grants approved since 1977 - \$770,923

Uniting Church in Australia Network Magazine, March 2016

Visit from West Papuans

In May we had a visit from members of the West Papuan community and enjoyed their wonderful singing.



Connection with Tonga

The Ford family were part of the St Luke's community some years ago; and son, Andrew, has recently been appointed Australian High Commissioner in Tonga.

Andrew and his wife Christine, are enjoying the warmer climate, and the friendliness of the Tongan people.

