

THE NEW VINE



UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
Blackall Range Uniting Churches
(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville and Palmwoods)
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EDITORIAL COMMENT

By the time this edition of *The New Vine* comes out, we will be well along the way on our Lenten walk with Jesus to Calvary. No doubt many, if not most, of us are engaged in some form of Lenten study that helps us with a process of reflection and self-examination as is the custom of the church. There is always benefit in stopping and looking at where we stand with our faith and how we are putting it into practice, and this whole process will lead us naturally to Easter and all Jesus' death and resurrection means for us.

So, this edition does not concentrate at all on Lent and Easter – it recognises that our study, contemplation and worship will do this for us.

What I hope it does, however, is supplement what we are doing day by day by raising the issue of DIVERSITY so it can become part of our Lenten reflections where we discover what our own experience is; what our own attitudes are; what our own practices are; what action we may take to increase our understandings and actions and so on. It raises the issue of whether diversity is something we recognise and we try to engage with; or is it something we see and live with as that has always been the way of things; or is it something to be accepted, celebrated and entered into with vigour?

I'd like to suggest readers choose a few articles and use them as an aid to their reflections.

Since the day I first arrived here twelve years ago, I have been mightily impressed with the diversity of theological views that we hold between us – and for me, the miracle is that, broadly, we have held it all together. This, for me, is true gospel living – holding in balance any differences and recognition that the other points of view are just as valid as our own as we move forward together to serve the Lord together. Amen to that!

Some may think the diversity covered in these pages is a little restrictive. I would agree and perhaps we might look to doing more sometime in the future. In the meantime, it may be interesting to always keep the diversity prism close by, so we can view most things we encounter through it, as some of the articles do.



We will never really experience diversity until we are conscious of its existence and realise we are part of it. The challenge is, I think, to become an active part of it while still exercising our Christian faith.

To lighten things up a little, let's just think on a couple of things that happen around the world at Easter and see if we can understand them and even, perhaps, participate in them in our minds, at least:

- Some countries carry over their serious Lenten fasting until Easter has finished
- The stations of the Cross are sometime celebrated by parading through the street while others remain in their churches
- Easter Sunday is celebrated by a huge community barbeque followed by a massive egg hunt organised and sponsored by local government so all can participate
- Some countries celebrate Easter on a different date depending on the moon's cycle

- You break eggs with your neighbour and the one whose egg doesn't break will have luck throughout the year
- Military parades are sometimes involved with Easter celebrations as it is the most important holiday of the year
- A strict 40 day fast through Lent is broken by feasting on Easter Day
- Hard boiled eggs are rolled down hills [competitively] to symbolise the rolling away of the stone
- Other places roll them down roof tiles to see which takes the longest to break
- Some countries have Easter baskets full of gifts, hidden in the back garden, for children to search for and find
- In one country, where church bells ring every day [except the three days leading to Easter Day when they fall silent] all ring on Easter Day and are supposed to drop presents in every garden for children to find after lunch
- Some countries have Easter cake rather than chocolate Easter bunnies
- Some cold countries have Willow Sunday instead of Palm Sunday as palms cannot be found

It becomes clear that Easter means different things for different people – one definition of diversity.

However you see things, may you experience all the various emotions and experiences of Easter and be further strengthened to live your life with the risen Jesus as a result.

Peace and blessings

Graham

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Retired Ministers: Rev Graham Dempster, Rev Bruce Johnson, Rev Bob Philpot, Rev Ron Potter, Rev Brian Richards, Rev George Woodward.



SMILE A WHILE

A little girl walked to and from school daily. Though the weather that morning was questionable and clouds were forming, she made her daily trek to school. As the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up, along with lightning.

The little girl's mother felt concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school. She also feared the electrical storm might harm her child. Full of concern, she got into her car and quickly drove along the route to the school.

As she did, she saw her little girl walking along. At each flash of lightning, the child would stop, look up, and smile. More lightning followed quickly and with each, the little girl would look at the streak of light and smile.

When the mother drew up beside the child, she lowered the window and called, "What are you doing?"

The child answered, "I am trying to look pretty because God keeps taking my picture."

May God Bless You Today and every day as you face the storms that come your way !!

LIENA'S LINES

"There is no Jew or Greek,
slave or free,
male and female;
since you are all one in Christ Jesus."
(Galatians 3:28)

Accepting different persons and perspectives in the church seems to have always been nettlesome. From the days of Abraham and his foreign wives Sarah, Hagar and Keturah, as well as Moses and his wives Zipporah and a Cushite. Ethnic and religious divisions continued into the first century and we know of the divisions between Samaritans and Jews; and later between the Jews and Greeks. Then came the Catholics and Protestants and today there is almost an innumerable number of denominations and religious groups.

The division between slave or free, persons of different socio-political class, is also well known and persists today in for instance citizens, temporary visa holders and refugees. And undeniably, the division between male and female in the church continues.

Yet differences and diversity is to be celebrated. Diversity enriches our lives, our interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures and our experiences as Christians.

It is well known that the reading of the Scriptures by persons of different colour, culture, class and gender have indeed enriched our understanding of Scripture. Black and female theologians have taught us to reread the Scriptures and learn more about the God we believe in and follow. The reading of God's care for the aliens and strangers will certainly be understood differently when read by a refugee than a third generation citizen. And this is okay.

Theological diversity, including different understandings of the sacraments, of traditions like marriage, of ethical issues about health and sexuality are good - in so far as they do not divide us. Diverse interpretations can serve to enrich and enhance our understanding of God. Remembering also that our knowledge and comprehension will, during our time on earth, remain limited and hazy and we will not know things fully. However, our knowledge and understanding can be deepened, especially so through diverse theological interpretations.

Being one in Christ does not mean being the same. Jew and Greek does not become *Jewreek*; slave or free a *slavee*; or male and female a *uni* (pardon my creation of new words). Being one does not mean that we become morphed into the same being. We retain our distinctness. Being one, means we are distinct, but not divided.

Being one in Christ means we need to be aware of what makes us distinct, and also aware of what makes others distinct to us. It asks us to be sensitive to the distinctions, in ourselves and in others, so we can celebrate them and not criticise the otherness of another.

Being one in Christ means we are not the same, but equal, regardless of ethnicity, class or gender. And this, the diversity of our distinctness and our equality, we celebrate.

May we discover the distinctions in ourselves and in our sisters and brothers in Christ and celebrate them and praise God for enriching our lives.

Shalom Liena

A LENTEN PRAYER

Written by UCA President Dr Deidre Palmer

As we enter into this season of Lent, we follow Jesus to Jerusalem, travelling with him in his suffering, and to his death. This year, we are mindful of the suffering experienced by so many in our world right now. In this time of preparation and discipline, may we journey toward the transforming hope and joy of his resurrection, mindful of Jesus' steadfast and enduring love, in the midst of danger, fear and grief. As followers of Jesus, God reminds us again of God's deep and healing love for us and for all people.

Compassionate Christ,

You speak to our deepest longings for love, hope and meaning.

You call us into communion with you.

*Draw close to us, as we take time in this season, to pray, to reflect,
and to open our lives to the transforming presence of your Holy Spirit.*

*As we journey with you to Jerusalem and remember your suffering,
we pray you will open our hearts to the suffering of the world.*

*Open our eyes and ears to see the needs of our neighbours
and hear the voices of those who are grieving and wounded.*

*Strengthen our resolve to journey with you into justice, and into
solidarity with all those who long for liberation.*

*As we journey with you to Easter, may you renew us in following your Way
and empower us to be bearers of God's good news of love,
compassion and hope to our world.*

Amen



A THOUGHT

From a Couple in the Maleny Congregation

We like this as it speaks to us of "diversity".

"The music is different for each of us but how beautiful the dance".

(Source unknown)



SOMETHING TO PONDER

I was having a bit of a clean-up of my papers recently and I came across something I have had for a while that was buried near the bottom of the pile. I was preparing *The New Vine* at the time, so diversity was running through my mind. When I saw this card, it reminded me of the diversity of religious expression there is in the world so I thought I should share it as it reflected a Buddhist way of seeing the world.

The front of the card shows:



While the reverse side includes these words

no mud no lotus

Calligraphy by Thich Nhat Hanh

*the lotus flower cannot be there without the mud.
likewise, happiness cannot be there without suffering.
looking deeply into our suffering we gain an understanding of it,
which gives happiness a chance to blossom.
thus, the lotus does not have to reject the mud,
and the beauty of the lotus actually gives value to the mud.*

zen master Thich Nhat Hanh is a global spiritual leader, loved and revered around the world. He is the man Martin Luther King Jnr called "an apostle of peace and non-violence when nominating him for the nobel peace prize, and has been described by the new york times as "second only to the Dalai Lama" among Buddhist leaders influential in the west.

Given our diversity of thinking, I expect we will all read this in our own way.

BOOK REVIEW

I am always pleased to receive the review of a book that a member of our congregations has read, found interesting, and considers worthy of sharing. The following review was sent to me last October and has been sitting in my files just waiting for the right moment. The theme of diversity seemed to be that time. If it invites you to want to read it, I am sure Karl would be happy to lend it to you [if he can find it again after such a lengthy time]. *Graham*

Translating Lives (Mary Besemeres & Anna Wierzbicka – UQP)

This book is subtitled “*Living with Two Languages and Cultures*” and is a collection of personal observations by a number of people for whom two languages are (or have become) in common use in their daily lives.

The main observations in each story revolve around the inability to translate accurately what one wants to say from, for example, the “mother” tongue to the more recently acquired, and also raises the close connection between culture and language so that expressions in the other language have no context to bind to, resulting in misunderstandings and even hurt on occasions.

The non-English languages featured are Noongar (South-west – W.A. Indigenous language), German, Fiji-Hindi, Russian, 'Shanghainese', Mandarin, and Cantonese, Portuguese, Polish, Korean, and Arabic. Most of the contributors are linguists or language teachers by profession.

I found the book most interesting and an enlightening experience. As a bilingual person myself, I had not focused on the cultural aspects before as I had simply compartmentalised the two languages and it made me think about how my perceptions of Australian 'reality' have been coloured by my residual cultural baggage. I have known for a long time that reading in another language gives a wholly different colour to the topic but had never analysed it like these contributors.

As examples of cultural issues, two come to mind as I write. The first is what I might call the east-Asian assumption of respect and cooperation expected of the younger by the older such that expressions such as 'please' and 'thank you' are seen as socially distancing. The second is a more trivial example where someone gives another two flowers which in one culture is seen as lucky whereas the other sees it as appropriate for a funeral. Who would expect that?

If you want a quick introduction to multicultural issues, I can recommend this book as an eye-opener. I, myself, have misgivings about the word 'multicultural' since it implies that we must all continually take all the possible cultural mores into account which will inevitably become terribly tedious for most.

KARL TIETZE

Editor's Note

Interestingly, when the contributions to this edition were reviewed before printing, it became apparent that this article was probably related to a few others from other places – *The Lord's Prayer* and *Let's look at the UCA* came immediately to mind.

More by good luck than by good judgement!

A POET'S COMMENT

At the time of President Biden's inauguration, I thought the poem presented by the 22 year old poet, Amanda Gordon, was quite wonderful and amazing – and so I copied it with the intention of sharing it. But when the topic of diversity came along, I wondered if it would fit that theme. So, I re-read it, a couple of times, and it still inspired me and lifted my spirit – and, it spoke to me quite intensely about diversity which was a bonus.

I commend it to you to read through the prism of diversity and hear and see the hope it engenders.

In fact, I think it may be worth keeping and reading from time to time when things look a bit bleak.

The Hill We Climb by Amanda Gordon



*"When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade
We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished
We the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one
And yes we are far from polished
far from pristine
but that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect
We are striving to forge a union with purpose
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colours, characters and conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us*

*We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious
Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division
Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promise to glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy
And this effort very nearly succeeded
But while democracy can be periodically delayed
it can never be permanently defeated
In this truth
in this faith we trust
For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves
So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free
We will not be turned around
or interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next generation*

*Our blunders become their burdens
 But one thing is certain:
 If we merge mercy with might,
 and might with right,
 then love becomes our legacy
 and change our children's birthright
 So let us leave behind a country
 better than the one we were left with
 Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
 we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one
 We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,
 we will rise from the windswept northeast
 where our forefathers first realized revolution
 We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,
 we will rise from the sunbaked south
 We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
 and every known nook of our nation and
 every corner called our country,
 our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
 battered and beautiful
 When day comes we step out of the shade,
 aflame and unafraid
 The new dawn blooms as we free it
 For there is always light,
 if only we're brave enough to see it
 If only we're brave enough to be it."*

In my view, it would be entirely appropriate to add – AMEN

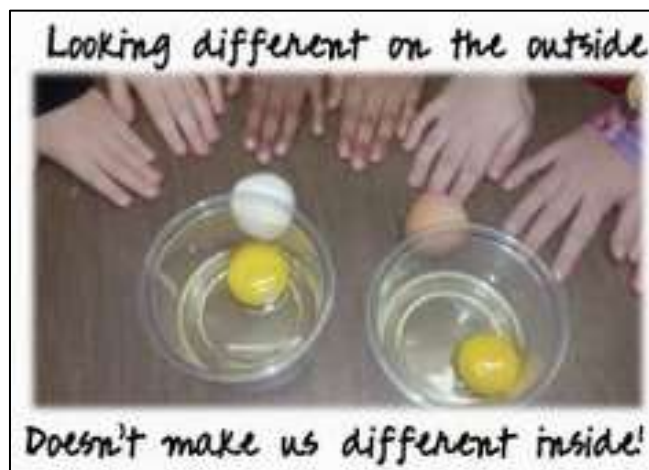


A SERVICE ON HOPE

In the last edition we were challenged to try to find hymns/songs of hope to include in an imaginary church service. Judging from the responses, we have a desire for short church services as the only hymns/songs suggested, were:

1. Great is Thy Faithfulness ("bright hope for tomorrow")
2. Lord of all hopefulness (God who is with us throughout the journey of life)
3. My Hope is built on nothing less (obvious!)
4. All my hope on God is founded!

Ah well, it was worth a try!



FISHING

Many who know my love of fishing have heard me describe it thus:

It is the only human activity that has a prawn at both ends of a line.

Be that as it may, I had pause on Ash Wednesday that suggested to me I rethink this a little. There may be something more to fishing after all. I guess I'll have to discuss it with the men in these photos sometime, as they often head off together on fishing expeditions. And there are stories



However, my thought changer came from one of my daily devotional readings which was emailed from Father Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan monk, who raised fishing in a slightly different context as outlined below:

RR - Christians often use the season of Lent (which begins today), the six and a half weeks preceding Easter, to reconnect with God and the fullness of our own humanity—the good and the bad—in some intentional way. The act doesn't need to be sacrificial or impressive, but I've found that some form of contemplative practice, reflection, or commitment is a wonderful way to draw closer to God during



this time. The world insists that we are what we do and achieve, but contemplation invites us to practice under-doing and under-achieving, and reminds us of the simple grace and humility of being human. I offer you this description from Barbara Holmes about her own nature-based contemplative practice.*

BH - One of the ways I practice contemplation in my life is through fishing. It's the space and the place where I find a real connection through the ocean, the waves, the sound of the water, the birds diving, and the struggle with the adversary, which is the fish. Now, normally we throw them back, but on occasion we bless them for giving us nurture and nourishment and we keep them.

I fish with my husband George....[who] loves to be in support of it, so we don't talk a lot. We commune, we listen to music sometimes, other times not. But it's being in the cycle of life and enjoying that struggle. And enjoying giving life back and releasing some. And realizing that this is the dream that I asked God for long ago. And so, God's grace for me has been that my husband and I live out a dream I've had since I was a child, to breathe salt air, and to just learn how to be.... But to just be is such a blessing!

RR - *I suppose the equivalent of Barbara's fishing in my life would be walking my dog. It really can be a contemplative practice where I engage with God, with nature, and with my own beloved friend, Opie. I'm not really doing anything. I'm just being me and being in love with the world.*

This all suggested there are many ways of undertaking contemplative practice in our lives – it is not all sitting with the bible or some other text and praying. It can be about consciously engaging with God and creation at any time – in the very simplest of every-day activities.

* Barbara A. Holmes is an African American academic and minister who preaches and teaches spirituality and its relationship with the total cosmos and her book, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press: 2017), xxviii provided the above information

** I am assured the big flathead was released to fight another day and I suspect the others were "blessed for giving nurture and nourishment".

KIDS' RIDS

How is the pandemic like my stomach after Christmas?

It'll take ages to flatten the curve.

Why couldn't Mary and Joseph join their work conference call?

Because there was no Zoom at the inn.

What do you call a deer which has lost its eyes?

No idea. (No eye deer).

Why would a bee be wandering down the expressway with its legs crossed?

Maybe it is looking for a BP station.

Why would a female sheep be arrested by the highway police?

For making an illegal ewe turn.

Why does the ocean roar?

Wouldn't you if you had crabs on your bottom?

What must you always keep, after giving it to someone else?

Your word.

ONE PERSON'S VIEW

When you look up the dictionary, you find many suggestions as to what “diversity” means. Even from a dictionary point of view, it appears to be a very difficult word to explain.

Diverse is an adverb, and in my dictionary, it is described in this way:

“in describing ideas or opinions it may suggest degrees of difference that may be at odds or challenging to reconcile.”

or another way:

“showing a great deal of variety, or distinct, or alternate.”

So, do we have DIVERSITY in Australia.

Of course, we do. How could we have so many people from different parts of the globe, practicing their own culture or part of ours and not have diversity. So as a country we have diversity within our borders.

But do we accept diversity in our minds?

It is very easy, as I have done above, to simply look at diversity as a way of living, but it really is a way of thinking. How do I appreciate and try to understand the thoughts of another person, which in the main, are different from mine.

Is this difficult?

Of course it is, because we have all been brought up understanding that the things taught to us (no matter where you were taught) are undoubtedly correct.

I find my greatest problem in understanding diversity is that I do not listen to other concepts sufficiently, and then do not research them sufficiently.

We are all given “God given rights”, and I think one of those rights is to think.

I am now what they call “mature age” and I think that for many years I have really not understood diversity.

But I’m trying.

COLIN HARDING



ANOTHER PERSON'S VIEW

Diversity means different things to different people. It covers just about everything and sometimes we can become befuddled trying to balance what is said and what is done.

For example, look at this photo recently published in *The Guardian* with the comment “*Diversity makes us stronger, inclusion improves our institution.*”



It shows 8 white men [There is a woman and another man on the screens in the background] sitting around a table trying to convince us that the Canadian Defence Force is right to pride itself for its diversity. A cynic might ask – Where are the women? Where are the dark faces? Where are those who might wear a hijab?

Or, another picture from *The Guardian* a day or so later says much the same thing.



The headline this time was something like - *Japan's ruling party is committed to gender equality.*

The problem became that the women were not allowed to speak!!
Diversity means different things to different people, indeed!

However, all that is bye the bye. My real interest is in another story that I found a bit surprising given my own prejudices, biases, understandings and ignorance.

Many of us have been wondering how the world may change after COVID. We are hoping for it to change for the better and so I was reading a book about this when I came across information I would like to share. I quote:

“A sign is something that stands out and strikes us. A sign of hope in this crisis is the leading role of women.

Women have been at the same time among the most affected and the most resilient in the crisis. Affected because they are more likely to be on the front line of the pandemic – about 70 percent of all those working in health care worldwide are women – but also because they are harder hit economically while working in the informal or unpaid sector.

The countries with women as presidents or prime ministers have on the whole reacted better and more quickly than others, making decisions swiftly and communicating them with empathy.

What does this sign invite us to think about? What might the Spirit be saying to us?

I think of the strength of the women in the Gospel following the death of Jesus. They were not paralysed by the tragedy, nor did they flee. For love of the Master, they went to the tomb to anoint Him. Like so many women in this pandemic, they were able to hold it together, to get around obstacles in their path and keep hope alive in their families and the community. Because they did so, they were first to receive the astonishing news: “He is not here; for he has been raised [Matthew 28:6]. The Lord first announced the New Life to women because they were present, attentive, open to new possibilities.

Could it be that in this crisis the perspective women bring is what the world needs at this time to face the coming challenges?

Could the Spirit be prompting us to recognise, value, and integrate the fresh thinking that some women are bringing to this moment?

I am thinking in particular of women economists whose fresh thinking is especially relevant for this crisis. Their call for an overhaul of the models we use to manage economies is attracting attention. Theirs is a perspective born of their practical experience of the “real” economy, which they say has opened their eyes to the inadequacy of standard textbook economics. It was often their unpaid or informal work, their experience of maternity, or running households in addition to high-level academic work, that made them aware of the flaws in dominant economic models of at least the last seventy years.

I don’t mean to put them in the same basket just because they are all women. They are each different from each other, and no doubt disagree about many things. Yet it is striking how these influential economists have put the focus on areas long sidelined by mainstream thinking, such as care for creation and for the poor, the value on nonmonetized relationships and the public sector, as well as the contribution of civil society to generating wealth. I see them advocating a more “maternal” economy, one that isn’t focused solely on growth and profit but asks how economies can be geared to helping people to participate in society and thrive. They advocate an economy that sustains, protects, and regenerates, not just regulates and arbitrates. Such ideas, long dismissed as idealistic or unrealistic, now seem prescient and relevant.

The author goes on to name, and look at, some of these female economists to explain his reasoning for support and to outline the directions their thinking is taking. He then continues:

My concern is not to assess their theories – I am not qualified – but to assess the ethos of this thinking. I see ideas formed from their experience in the periphery, reflecting a concern about the grotesque inequality of billions facing extreme deprivation while the richest one percent own half of the world’s financial wealth. I see an attentiveness to human vulnerability; a desire to protect the natural world by seeing pollution as a cost that must be offset against the balance sheet. I see a concern for economies that allow all who can to access work, and that place a higher value on work that generates not just wealth for shareholders but also value for society. I see thinking that is not ideological, which moves beyond the polarization of free market capitalism and state socialism, and which has at its heart a concern that all of humanity have access to land, lodging and labour. All of these speak to priorities of the Gospel and the

principles of the Church's social doctrine. It is reasonable, then, to see this "rethinking" by women economists as a sign of our time that we should pay attention to.

As Karl would say in Karl's Korner – "What do you think?"

The book from which this lengthy quote is taken is *LET US DREAM – The path to a better future* by Pope Francis.

He goes on to outline the numerous women he has appointed to significant positions in the Vatican including the Director of Vatican Museums, Under-Secretary of the Secretariat of State, and membership of the Council for the Economy [six of the seven lay members are women].

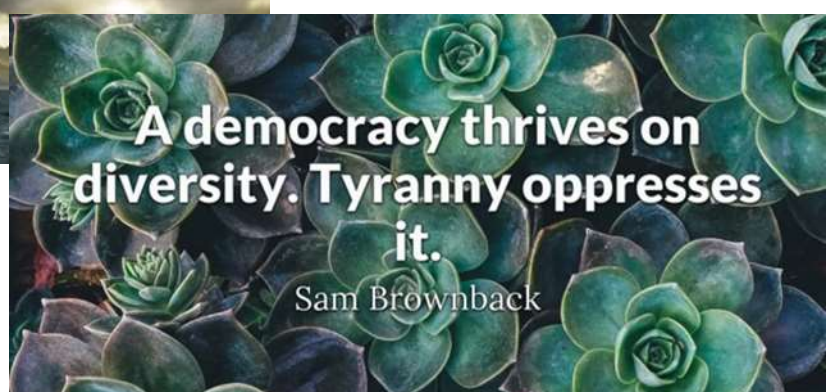
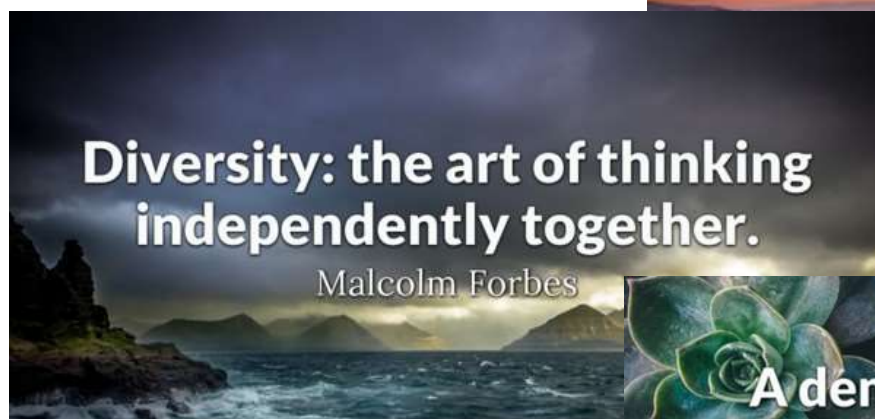
All this suggests to me a slow but steady possible change in the diversity balance in the Vatican and beyond.

[Note: I apologise for not being able to lend anyone this book as I purchased it in electronic form.]



LET'S LISTEN TO WHAT SOME OTHERS SAY

Diversity comes in all shapes and sizes – and in all areas of life. As we look at the following images, what do we see? What do we hear?



180 DEGREES OF DIVERSITY or SHADES OF GREEN IN OUR GARDEN

The double title gives a hint that I want to share what I see from our mostly South facing windows and that I encourage you to stretch your imaginations and see pictures of yourself or others in the variety of food sources on offer.

Panning from left to right, let's begin with the flamboyant Ivory Curl. Currently looking it's most spectacular, it is attractive to human eyes and totally addictive for the neighbour's bees.

Standing sentinel beside the moon gate are the somewhat exotic sounding black sapote, loved by some who enjoy the chocolate pudding flesh, and the kumquat nagami, appreciated by a select few who tolerate the raw tangy flavour.

The wood chip walkway, bordered by spiky pineapples and soft fleshed pawpaws, invites discovery of pumpkins and invasive chokos which are threatening to take over a fence line and our neighbour's territory.

Fruit trees continue with their widely diverse leaf structure and growth habit.

- Persimmon produce well but the fruit seldom reaches the dinner table as birds feast first.
- Jaboticaba have an inbuilt security system in that the luscious fruit is on the trunk and somehow the birds are fooled into letting us gather huge harvests (usually)
- The contrasting size of the dwarf grumichama and the huge custard apple mean that one stays in its original petite size and the other needs metres of limbs regularly pruned to reduce its domination.
- The nectarine and fig are almost for show only. Neither produces usable quantities of fruit but both have seasonal periods of beauty with blossoms and / or new leaves.



Glimpses of thriving bananas on the edge of the far side of the gully, and the never-likely-to-thrive-in-deep-shade macadamia, avocado, lychee, mango and finger lime are evidence that sunlight is essential.

One becomes philosophical about failures.

Then there is the row of 5 citrus trees. Every home gardener loves to be able to pick fruit and know that Vitamin C requirements are met! (Just letting you know that if ever you require limes it is most likely that there will be some on the tree).

Continue past the yet-to-prove-themselves blueberries and the super productive Davidson plum and we finally arrive at the ever-changing raised vegetable garden beds. I'm ever optimistic and like to think every meal has one or more items we have grown.

While ever I can, I will continue to enthuse about partnering with our bountiful Creator.

NANCY BAKER

LET'S LOOK AT THE UCA



There are many ways to look at an institution to see how it is handling cultural diversity. In the Blackall Range UC, we know a little about it. However, that knowledge arises mainly through the experience of worshippers at Palmwods where it is very real and something to be celebrated. In our other two congregations our experience is a little more remote. But I know, at the national level, we claim to be a multicultural church.

After the national Assembly in 1985, we announced to the world that UCA was a multi-cultural church – whatever that means.

I do not pretend to know all the answers but am sharing my incomplete knowledge, and some information gleaned from the Assembly's web page, in the hope that [1] we may all come to a better understanding of our church and [2] others may add to my effort in future editions based on their experience.

Where to start?

The most recent comprehensive data on the national church can be found in the National Church Life Survey's [NCLS] 2013 Census on this website [2013 UCA Census Report](#). It is 8 years old but gives a fascinating look at the church. I did not use it to look at diversity because there is more up to date information on the Assembly website – you have to work at finding it – but it shows how cultural diversity within the church is increasing. However, reading the NCLS report is really worth the effort as it covers a wide variety of the church's make-up, activities and practices. I recommend it to you.

Here are some facts I extracted from the Assembly website:

- There are about 200 congregations and faith communities from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse [CALD] backgrounds. I understand these to be stand-alone congregations who meet separately from Anglo groups
- The UC has 220 CALD ministers – many of whom are leading Anglo congregations
- Each Sunday we worship in around 45 languages other than English [15 of which are languages of First Peoples]
- Within the Assembly, there are 13 National Conferences which support congregations of the same culture in their life within the UCA
- The National Conferences enable the voices of the different communities to be heard and make a distinctive contribution to the life of the Uniting Church
- There are now 13 National Conferences: Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Indonesian, Korean, Tamil, Chinese, South Sudanese, Filipino, Niuean, Vietnamese, Middle East and Ibero-Latino
- The conferences vary in size and each conference decides when and how often they will meet.
- Many of the UCA's important documents and liturgies have been translated into the languages of the Conferences. e.g. *Basis of Union, Code of Ethics, Constitution and Regulations, Holy Communion and Marriage services*

There was one section of the website that taught me quite a bit and I'd like to share some of it as it spoke very strongly to my ignorance of other cultures. It included information brochures from some of the conferences and spelt out some customs and practices that are different from what we would expect, and this made me realise how the Anglo assumption, or mine at least, is so blinkered and expecting that our way is the only way, and we expect everyone else to fit in – no questions asked. But when I saw some of these customs, I realised how wrong we are and just how difficult this assumption makes it for people from other cultures to understand us and to fit in.

A few examples may show what I mean.

- In one culture, the first week of every year is a week of prayer where churches meet morning and evening each day for prayer and devotion
- Easter is a time for family [not youth] camps - time for strict reflection and spiritual checking
- Stewardship Sunday is one Sunday late in the year where annual lump sum offerings are committed and made [I can hear our Treasurer cheering]
- Most significant events are followed, not by a stately cup of tea, but by feasting.
- A New Year's Eve service was special where the year past was reviewed; forgiveness and mercy sought; resolutions made and consecrated
- One Sunday [May 5] is celebrated as Children's Day and another later in the Year is dedicated to Parents' Day. Each day has special services
- Another very special day is Independence Day which celebrates release from colonisers
- In one tradition, New Year's Day [in The Lunar Year] is most important – children give gifts to parents – but not on birthdays, or Mothers' and Fathers' days as in the West
- Some cultures mix old traditions with Christian celebration – e.g. The Moon Festival in the Lunar calendar
- One Sunday a year is devoted to the children preparing and leading worship
- Children's choirs are significant in all worship
- Some Pacific Island people follow closely the example of the first missionaries – wearing white to church is important for example
- At 6.00pm each Sunday a village bell announces evening devotions. People are to go to the nearest house and pray/sing with the family there by the time a second bell sounds after about 5 mins. It lasts 15-20 minutes. If caught outside after the second bell, you are fined
- The day the missionaries first arrived is always celebrated by all churches on the island coming together where all 13 congregations present a hymn etc

As well as all the above, there were a couple of quotes that I would like to put out there in the hope they might create discussion among us.

"The diversity is not only of cultures, but also the way of being church. Being church means different things to different people. Each one comes with a different expectation. They all come to be church together, and suddenly we are faced with the impossible task of being church because we do not agree what church is. For many migrant communities, the church is a central point that safeguards their identity. This identity is not only the Christian identity but also their cultural identity. These communities are in chaos or disequilibrium because they have been uprooted and now try to live in a foreign space. The church becomes the only reference point for them which provides the necessary safety they need to survive in this new and foreign space. Put this next to a community that has not left its comfort zone, and you will have conflicts and misunderstandings. This challenge also creates the opportunity for the different cultures to tell their stories, find common trends, and engage with each other.

In addition, there is tokenism. It is a concern that 35 years after the declaration of being a multicultural church we still appoint a token multicultural person as a representative or even create token multicultural committees. For western cultures, being present means full participation, while for most other cultures, presence does not translate to contribution, but an invitation is necessary. Most cultures have a respect structure and will operate within that structure even when they are outside of their culture. In western cultures respect is earned and the person will do his or her best to earn that respect. In most other cultures respect is given, and the person needs to live up to it to be able to keep that respect. In such cultures, a person will not talk or contribute unless explicitly asked to contribute with the specific gifts that they bring. They will not be representatives of their community but liaisons. We have the opportunity to learn the cultural nuances in the term "token" and step out of our worldview to understand the worldview of the other."

SERIOUS THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

How do we, the Blackall Range Uniting Church, be a multicultural church?

Towards the end of the preparation of this edition, someone sent me this story. I do not know if it was intended as their contribution to my request for articles, or not. Nevertheless, I decided to share it so as not to disappoint the sender. In doing so, I trust that I do not offend others – but it does have a point to it about diversity among denominations.

Neither the Congregational, Methodist nor Uniting Churches get a mention – I am not sure just what that says. Something to ponder.

The Presbyterian church called a meeting to decide what to do about their squirrel infestation. After much prayer and consideration, they concluded that the squirrels were predestined to be there, and they should not interfere with God's divine will.

At the Baptist church, the squirrels had taken an interest in the baptistery. The deacons met and decided to put a water-slide on the baptistery and let the squirrels drown themselves. The squirrels liked the slide and, unfortunately, knew instinctively how to swim, so twice as many squirrels showed up the following week.

The Lutheran church decided that they were not in a position to harm any of God's creatures. So, they humanely trapped their squirrels and set them free near the Baptist church. Two weeks later, the squirrels were back when the Baptists took down their water-slide.

The Episcopalians tried a much more unique path by setting out pans of whiskey around their church in an effort to kill the squirrels with alcohol poisoning. They sadly learned how much damage a band of drunk squirrels can do.

But the Catholic church came up with a more creative strategy! They baptized all the squirrels and made them members of the church. Now they only see them at Christmas and Easter.

Not much was heard from the Jewish synagogue. They took the first squirrel and circumcised him. They haven't seen a squirrel since.



KARL'S KORNER

Heresy – Does it Matter?

I sometimes wonder if we worry too much about having the same or "right" theology.

When I was in my late teens one of the folk who was going to "Bible College" said you did this to lose your faith. I presume this was because there is so little we really know from the Bible. Scholars talk about it being selected, edited, translated, redacted, and added to by others in places.

Why are we so focused on getting the "right" theology?

Is it about acquiring some special insight or knowledge to give us intellectual power over others? Or is it because we find it easier to cling to laws by which we can judge others and stick our own chests out?

The disciples ran into the same issues. They sought to stop others healing in Jesus' name (Mk. 9:38-39). They all struggled with the issue of circumcision which was a Jewish tradition. They sought special status in the coming kingdom (Mk.10:5-45) or asked who would be the greatest there (Matt. 19:27-30). And later Paul had the same trouble at Corinth (1 Cor.1:12-13).

Much later the emperor Constantine called the "bishops" together to thrash out one common religion resulting in the Nicene Creed but this did not stop others from thinking differently and the church got all stirred up with Nestorians and Marcions, et al.

Why did they not simply stick with Paul who said he preached Christ and Him crucified?

But the church still refused to get over the power kick. It launched the crusades thinking ownership of its sacred sites was necessary. It pursued and slaughtered the Cathars in the Albigensian wars because they had unorthodox beliefs. It implemented all manner of persecution in the name of one "right" theology through the inquisition. And for what? Was it to claim temporal power in the name of Jesus who had said that his kingdom was not of this world, and who, if we believe him to have been God incarnate, should have been able to use unimaginable power to get His way but didn't?

Yet the church still argues about

- who has inherited Jesus' mantle - Pope or English king/queen (Much like Islam);
- whose theology is right - Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant;
- whether baptism is only effective if one is dipped, dunked, or dribbled; or
- whether we meet for worship on Sunday or Saturday (I still wonder what the effect was of the introduction of the Gregorian calendar).

And some branches and people of the church still think it desirable to back theology with the law of the state (Abortion and Euthanasia - not to mention moralism). Indeed, doesn't this make 'theology' simply 'ideology'? And doesn't this make religion political?

I wonder if Jesus made a big deal of such ideas? I don't recall him saying we had to have the right theology or that there was only one set of 'right' beliefs. He only asked us to believe in him. If we introduce 'right' beliefs we end up back with law and condemnation, don't we?

What do you think?

KARL

FROM THE HEART AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Something for us all to learn from

The call for contributions about diversity has resulted in a few articles that look at diversity from a number of different angles. The piece that follows talks of the reality of living life among some of the worst aspects of diversity and I thought it was best addressed as a letter to us all [that was an editorial decision and not one suggested by Jasmine] – something a little more personal – so I hope we can all read it in this light and learn and change our practices where necessary. Graham

Dear members of Blackall Range Uniting Church

“Both my husband and I come from multicultural backgrounds and now our children are also part of a multicultural family. We understand very well the consequences and barriers we face on a daily basis because of this.

For generations, we have had to teach our children from young ages things that other families don't even have to think of when raising their families. For some people, they are not aware of any such differences going on in their communities and when asked would think that any stories told about racism nowadays are exaggerated or just not true. But for us, and for so many other families all over Australia, it is very true and is a big part of our day to day lives and is causing extreme consequences.

We have been forced to deal with judgment and racism from very young ages - from the first years of attending school, where students have said disgusting and cruel, hateful, racist words and teachers ask inappropriate and uncalled for questions, and judge from stereotypical views, through to being taught that most likely when we walk out our door into the community doing normal day to day errands, there is a chance that security will ask to look in our bags or ask us why we are at the shops and what we are there to buy. Sometimes, we are even asked to stay where we are while they check the security footage to make sure we haven't taken anything from their store. We have police pulling us over to ask whose car we are driving and why we are driving in Kawana when we are from Burnside. They also want to search the vehicle for no reason. This has all happened to our family over the years. These behaviours are expected in our communities, every day. Even when addressed, they are pushed away and nothing is done; no apologies are given; and if we dare ask why, we are labelled troublemakers. This is just the tip of what we, and other families, all over Australia experience on a regular basis.

It is also one of the reasons it took me so long to attend church. I had been thinking of going to church for a long time but didn't feel comfortable or welcomed fully by some people I had met that attended some of the churches I was looking at, at the time. We had heard about Palmwoods Uniting Church from the Tongan community and thought it might be a church that would be perfect for us. We have now been attending Palmwoods for over six years and feel very welcomed and loved from all who attend. We also attend Montville and Maleny on occasions and feel very welcomed there too. We do feel that there are struggles we face, and situations that arise that some people at church can't understand, or help with sometimes, because Australia has not been open with the history of its past and, in hiding the truth, has left room for the people now living in Australia to dismiss the reality of the damage that has been passed on from generation to generation. Not being open and honest in discussions leaves room for people who are trying to be culturally correct and respectful, still saying things that might be offensive without knowing, due to a lack of knowledge.

We hope for change and try to stay positive but, if the past is any indication of the future, we will be forced to struggle with this burden and never be accepted fully and understood for generations to come.”

JASMINE DAVIES

COLOUR

Life is not black and white. Neither is it grey. Life is colourful. And black and white are only two of the colours in a myriad of colours.

Yet, many of us, especially we who have been raised in a Western style education, think and operate in black and white. In dualism. Our lives are dualistic: black and white, right and wrong, left and right; body and soul; nature and humankind.

Dualism is “the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided (Oxford Dictionary). Unconsciously, since perhaps the time of Aristotle we are binary wired: black and white. But we have learnt that this is not true. Life is colourful, and more than black and white.

Yes, life is colourful. It is more than wrong or right. Right is not always right and wrong is not always wrong. Sometimes there is no wrong nor right answer. Other times there is more than one right answer, and sometimes more than one wrong.

Life is more than body and soul. We now know to look at ourselves more holistically, that we are intricate creatures, fearfully and wonderfully made. And we have learnt that life is more than nature and humankind, and that humans and nature are intricately and intimately linked.

Life is colourful and diverse. And like colour enriches our lives, so does diversity. I recently remarked to someone that I miss the diversity of Africa – the diversity of colour, culture and creed. In South Africa I would interact, daily, with persons of different colour, different faith, different language, different culture, different class, and different bank balances. At first glance along the Blackall Range, I seem to be living in a primarily homogeneous society which generally may be described as white, middle-class and English speaking.

Yet, upon deeper reflection the local society is more diverse in colour, culture and creed. However, we are perhaps not so exposed, not so aware of it. And our blinkered vision makes us insensitive to the ways and practices of others; blind to the needs and stumbling blocks of those who are different to us and living among us. May we make a conscientious effort to seek persons who are different, so we can enrich our lives.

Life is colourful. Thank God!

LIENA



When I born, I **Black**,
When I grow up, I Black,
When I go in Sun, I Black,
When I cold, I Black,
When I scared, I Black,
When I sick, I Black,
And when I die, I still Black,
And you calling me **coloured**

And you **White** fella,
When you born, you Pink,
When you grow up, you White,
When you go in Sun, you Red,
When you cold, you Blue,
When you scared, you Yellow,
When you sick, you Green,
And when you die, you Gray.

This poem **COLOURED** was written by an African child and nominated best poem of 2015. Sadly, despite extensive searching it was not possible to find the author/poet's name.



THE LORD'S PRAYER

In last year's Autumn edition, there was an article that explored different versions of the Lord's Prayer that we have encountered from time to time. The article suggested there may be other versions readers were aware of they would like to share. None were forthcoming at the time, but some time later, I received one from a UCA minister serving in Brisbane that fits our diversity theme to a T.

The Lord's Prayer as approved for use by our churches and with which we are all familiar.

The English Language Liturgical Consultation (1988)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

The prayer was translated into the language of the Narrinyini People of the Lower Murray River who worked in the late 19th century with Congregationalist missionary George Taplin and his wife who had studied and learned the language.

It is interesting to see the result of its being translated back into English by the same people.

Our Father on top sky,
Thy name be feared.
Thou art our boss.
Men-women will listen to Thee this place earth
as the good souls of men-women listen to Thee on top sky.
Give us tucker till this sun goes down.
We did wrong; make us good.
We have good hearts to them who did us wrong.
Watch us against bad place.
Thy hands be stretched out to guard us from bad.

There are glimpses of Karl's Korner.

