

A Pilgrim People: 40 Years On

National Uniting Church History Conference



All of this is us

Uniting Church in Australia

National Conference Updates

Plans for the conference are coming along, and the program is being finalised.

Keynote Speaker

Dr Renate Howe has been confirmed as the keynote speaker for the conference. We look forward to hearing what she has to share

Call for Papers

A Call for Papers has been issued, and is available at the conference website (<http://http://historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au/national-conference/>)

In summary, we invite papers (20 minutes in length) addressing the conference theme (A Pilgrim People: 40 years on) from conference delegates. The organisers hope the theme is broad and flexible enough to accommodate the research interest of most presenters but encourages anyone who feels unduly constrained by it to offer their paper anyway.

Authors are invited to submit an abstract up to 250 words. Abstracts can be emailed to admin@historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au

The deadline for submission of abstracts is 31 January 2017, and accepted authors/presenters will be notified by 28 February 2017.

Conference Registration

Registrations for conference attendance is now open, and the registration form can also be found on the website for the conference (address above).

Registrations have been set at

- Full conference attendee: \$150 (\$120 concession)

- Early bird rates (for registration before 28/2/17): \$120 (\$100 concession)
- Day registration (Saturday or Sunday and includes event of the day): \$65/day
- Saturday or Sunday evening only (public events): \$10/event

Keeping up to date

The conference website will be updated as new information comes to hand, and we will be sending out regular email updates as well. You can sign up for conference specific updates at the conference website.

Questions?

Please contact

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Uniting History SA December 2016

Congregations as Communities of Memory

In this the final newsletter for 2016, we are reminded that congregations are not only learning and worshipping communities but are also communities of memory. Congregational identities are formed and shaped by experiences that are both positive and negative and events that we share, live on, and remain with us in memory.

In our lead article John Watt shares his thoughts with us about his experience in producing the story of the West Lakes church—*A Sign of Hope. The story of the vision, the planning, the planting and the first eight years of the West Lakes United Parish*. He recalls the experience of members in one place at a particular time in history and how the book launch event in October enabled former members to confront their disappointments and loss, and discover forgiveness and experience reconciliation.

Other events in 2016 have also assisted us to discover that the work of history is contemporary as it brings to us inspiration, insight and moments of thankfulness. Many have been inspired by the editing work undertaken by the family of Peter Whittington as they produced for us Peter's reflections on his ministry in SA over many years.

We have also been inspired by the stories of those we celebrate when they are no longer with us, those in their time made major contributions to building up the community of faith. In this edition, we include an edited version of Don Catford's eulogy which can be summarised by the concluding paragraph:

Today, the spirit of Keith Smith lives on in each one of us, and more particularly, it lives on in the members of his family. His faith, integrity, heart for justice, love and compassion, enthusiasm and encouragement can live on in each one of us.

In the October/November 2016 edition of New Times, Julia Pitmans reflects on the October 'birth' of her book, *Our Principle of Sex Equality—The ordination of women in the Congregational church in Australia 1927-1977*. Julia suggests that "church history helps us understand how the church came to be what it is today. Furthermore, it helps us learn lessons about how to be the church today, to learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the church of the past."

All the research and publishing being undertaken provides resources for some great reading and reflection

over the summer break. This in itself generates a new enthusiasm and understanding of how we are indeed communities of memory.

As we continue to plan for 2017, we invite your contributions and suggestions for articles in the four editions of the newsletter next year. It would be great to hear from you and any comments you may wish to make.

Rev Dr Dean Eland

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News from the History Centre

Volunteers continue to serve the church and the wider community by providing advice and assistance for those involved in researching church, local and family history.

The centre welcomes volunteers to help manage the large and growing collection of documents, memorabilia, books and records of churches and agencies.

A number of upgrade works are being undertaken to improve the on-site amenities. The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, is open on Wednesday afternoons from 1:00pm to 4:00pm

PLEASE NOTE: The History Centre will be closed for Christmas and Summer from December 14, and will be reopening on February 1, 2017

(Other contact details can be found on page 2)



BOOK REVIEW

Rev Deacon Bill Harris, October 2016

FIGHTING SPIRIT, A History of Christianity at Waruwi, Goulburn Island

William W Emilsen, MediaCom Education Inc, Unley SA, 2016

A history of Christianity as it came to Waruwi Goulburn Island stimulated by the realisation that 2016 would be the centenary of the arrival of a Methodist missionary to establish a mission in Arnhemland.

In conjunction with others members of the Northern Synod and with agreement from the Northern Regional Council of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, William Emilsen, a NSW church historian undertook the extensive research required to fill some of the gaps in our records and compile a history of the developments over those years.

The end result is a record of history which begins with a brief examination of the history of the Goulburn Island people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when colonial explorers first placed it on our maps and when Macassan trepangers were regular visitors and established a thriving trepang industry which was to form an important part of mission activities in later years. The remains of their camps are still to be found at Wighu on Goulburn Island.

The mission story begins in 1915 when Rev James Watson is given the task of visiting this remote area to gain “first hand information concerning the aborigines and report back on a suitable site for a mission in North Australia.” A journey that was to take him three months travelling by foot with pack horses through out Western Arnhem land and by bicycle over sandy tracks as far South as Mataranka and the Roper River.

Arising out of his report came the decision to establish a mission on Goulburn Island and James Watson was appointed to start that work. His arrival by boat on a small sandy beach in June 1916 marked the beginning of Methodist missions in Arnhemland. The event is recorded in just four words entered in his diary on the 25th June 1916, “Began at Goulburn Island.” A beginning that was to lead to the establishment of mission stations across Arnhemland and today continues in the Pilgrim Presbytery of the Northern Synod and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

The history that Emilsen presents is structured around what he identifies as “ the four major activities of Methodist missionary work. “Industrial (agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, arts and crafts etc), educational medical and spiritual.” Industrial activities are given a particular focus as they are seen as providing what would otherwise be “an incomplete or impoverished picture of the holistic approach Methodism adopted in Northern Australia.”

This history also recognises the significant contribution

that indigenous people, Europeans and Pacific Islanders (mostly Fijians and Baduans) have made to Christianity on Goulburn Island. This was reflected in the plane loads of former mission workers who made the journey to Waruwi for the centenary celebrations and the Fijian celebrations which followed in the evening. “Though small in number Pacific Islanders have had an almost continuous presence since their arrival with the first missionaries (or perhaps even before)”

An insight into the difficulties associated with mission work comes early in the book when Emilsen writes; “For most of the 1920’s the Aboriginal Mission at Goulburn Island struggled. After the heady pioneering days of Watson, the infant mission was beset with numerous difficulties: a shortage of qualified staff, interpersonal conflict, ambition, rumour, incompetence, poor decisions and as the decade drew on financial pressures.” All difficulties which many will have observed over the century which followed and which are expanded on as the story unfolds.

A significant aspect of the centenary celebrations and a sign that Christianity continues to hold an important place in the community at Waruwi was the launching of the Maung translation of Mark’s gospel. A work begun by Heather Hinch, a missionary health worker and linguist at Waruwi in the 1960’s and finally completed by others in time for the celebrations in 2016.

Emilsen concludes his history with a summary of developments in the 1970’s. The period in which the church made strenuous efforts to ‘hand over’ activities and control of mission stations to indigenous people. This was the period in which ‘town councils’ emerged as the ‘political entity’ which increasingly assumed responsibility for the control and staffing of communities and the provision of services and local industries.’

It is unfortunate that Emilsen decided to end his history at that point because in so doing he failed to capture the changes in mission policies which occurred with the implementation of ‘Free to Decide’ and also the emergence of the indigenous church as a member of the Uniting Church in Australia. A significant story that is yet to be written. Despite this we have a detailed history of the development of Christian Missions in Arnhemland and in particular on the little Island of Waruwi.

dominant indicator of a dying church. If a more liberal theology is to have any role in the future of the church we must develop new forms of worship that communicate with generations ‘X’ and ‘Y’. We must move towards making worship more of an experience of the presence of God; we must move towards engaging the people in preparing and leading worship; we must move towards intergenerational worship. We have failed to use the powerful dynamics of the family



unit to enrich our worship. Instead we have clung to Sunday schools which split the family unit, disintegrate the church and inhibit learning.

I was greatly relieved to discover that with the help of all the know-how in the Historical Society, and their generous financial assistance, the process of printing and publishing was a doddle! The expertise of people like Judith Raftery and Val Canty was priceless. All I had to do was do what they said!

Then came the presentation and launching at West Lakes on the 25th September. Would the unhappiness many people still carried from 30 years ago re-emerge? The answer was ‘no!’ In fact, some lovely things happened that day. More people came than I had dared hope and it was as if several had been waiting for an opportunity to re-make relationships. Best of all, it seems that simply reading the book with its emphasis on reclaiming the joy has triggered a lot of healing. One person has told me how something in the book cleared up a hurtful misunderstanding she had carried all these years.

What began with tentative, mixed feelings has ended with a gratifying sense of accomplishment. I feel as if I have now completed one of the most profound experiences of my life.



L to R: Dean Eland, Bill Murchland, Kaye Johnson, Nola Watt, Judith Raftery, John Watt

The those who have lived before us

*Dear Lord,
thank you for drawing us into community
here in this place that has been called home for so
many.*

*Inspire us with the lives of those before us,
those ancient ones who have lived here in faith
and opened up and given away
your love to all those who needed it.*

*May you change us with a vision to continue here
as a constant presence for those who travel through
life,
a community of welcome that cares for all,
believing into what is still yet to be.*

*Teach us to discern your voice
as those before us have discerned your voice,
guided by its call and feeding on its promise
of life and hope and belonging.*

*May we hear your word:
a comforting word in its familiar sound,
yet a disturbing word in what it speaks anew
and longs for us to become.*

*Hold us within the faith of our forebears,
those who chose to meet you here in this place,
who recognised this thin place as a trysting place
where your miracle of grace abides.*

*May we be moved by that grace
into all the places that make up our community,
sharing what you have given abundantly
like an ever flowing stream.*

*Call us from our past,
through the voices of our ancestors,
in the songs they have sung
and the prayers they have spoken
that have shaped peace within this community,*

*And may we join our voice with their voice,
in the one great song of love
that will be lived and celebrated yet,
throughout this community.*

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Posted on “Listening to the Stones’ blog—
<http://newkilpatrickblog.typepad.com/nk-blogging/2013/02/anniversary.html>



REV. KEITH SMITH
19 March 1920—12
August 2016

The Church Perspective
Don Catford

I feel some sympathy for the writer of the letter to the Hebrews when he wrote, “Time is too short for me to tell you the stories of Gideon, Barak, Sampson and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.” (NEB) Likewise, time is too short for me to tell the stories of Maurice, Guv, Kyle, Arthur, Philip and Keith.

When Keith was in the last days of his life in the Royal Adelaide Hospital, he insisted that Marian give me his recent writing about his early life, “A reluctant advocate.”

In the Forward he writes, “*It was not my idea to become a parson! Within my limited experience of Methodist ministers, not one had provided a role model to which I might aspire. Our family was deeply immersed in the everyday life of the local congregation at Warradale and had links to the wider church, but the thought never entered my head that I should join the ranks of the ministry. In fact my memories included many incidents that would have dissuaded me had the idea ever entered my head. At least that was the case until I was 21. The choice of law as a career came about because of my school record in English and Latin and my interest in debating. In addition, Mum strongly influenced me to go to university in preference to working on the family property which she saw as hard labour.*”

In 1952, at a camp at Nunyara Conference Centre, it was the Rev. Maurice Wilmshurst who exerted a major influence on Keith. In Keith’s own words, He was, “a saintly man, and yet in no way did he fit the stereotype of a Methodist minister.” Subsequently, Keith subjected himself to various exams, trial preaching, interviews and the like and his call to ministry was affirmed. As the late Rev. Philip Potter remarked, “Keith’s call was a strong call, a clear call, a call that could not be denied.”

From the start it was apparent that Keith Smith was a man to be reckoned with; a strong, faithful and resilient minister. He loved the Church. He was not merely one of its ministers, but one of its most ardent guardians.

Keith obtained his Law degree in 1953 and soon after entered Theological College. From 1962 to 1965 he attended the Wesley Theological College in Washington DC and gained 2 Master Degrees; a Master of Divinity and a Master of Sacred Theology.

Keith was involved in parish ministry at Largs Bay and Taperoo, Unley and Black Forest prior to his 4 years in the States as a Student Pastor at Liberty Town in Maryland. On his return he spent time at Pirie Street Methodist Church. In 1978, the year after Church Union, he moved to this parish with congregations at Malvern, St Andrews and Manthorpe and stayed until 1985 when he became the CEO of Eldercare.

During his time at Malvern, Keith’s obvious gifts of leadership were evident and the Synod appointed him as Moderator from 1979-81, a position he filled effectively, efficiently and with grace. He was the second Moderator of the Uniting Church in SA (following Ian Tanner). The

Uniting Church was still finding its way during those early years and Keith’s solid grounding in Theology and his thorough understanding of its constitution and regulations stood the Church in good stead. With Kyle Waters by his side, and Ian Tanner in the background, there was not much that was not able to be sorted out.

Keith was a negotiator. He was Chair of the joint planning Committee for Church Union and member of the National Joint Constitution Council. He was part of the negotiation team that brought about the union of Pirie Street Methodist and Stow Memorial Congregations to form Pilgrim Church. And for 27 years Keith was involved as the Uniting Church negotiator for sorting out the division of Property between the Uniting Church, the Free Church and the Presbyterian Church. The Church owes a considerable debt of thanks to Keith whose background as a lawyer was very useful in all these negotiations.

Throughout his ministry Keith was a builder, a renovator, a designer of church buildings, church halls, manses and aged care facilities. He believed that these interests were installed in him from a young age when his father was a market gardener at Warradale and various alterations and renovations took place to the house and sheds. Many have made the comment that inside of Keith there was an architect trying to get out.

Keith was always worked for what was just, fair and equitable in society. For 5 years he was the Director of the Methodist Department of Christian Citizenship dealing with issues such as abortion, homosexuality, compulsory unionism, the Vietnam War and Third World development. Philip Potter commented that “due to his strong opposition, the establishment of the Adelaide Casino was delayed for 10 years.” Keith had a solid grasp of Christian ethics and sought to implement them in the everyday life of the community.



In 1974 Christian Education was added to his portfolio which among other things involved the upgrading of Adare Conference Centre and the building of Symons House at Nunyara.

Keith was a skilled administrator. He had a genuine ability to be able to cut through the red tape and get to the crux of an issue. He got things done and he usually got them done on time.

In each of his placements Keith showed a special concern for older people and this found expression when he accepted the role as CEO of Eldercare. Under his leadership, several small organisations were amalgamated and specialist facilities for people suffering from Alzheimer’s were established.

In all of the positions which Keith held in the life of the Church, he shared his wisdom, he supported his colleagues in ministry, he was ready to initiate new ideas; and didn’t find it difficult on occasion to be a stirrer. Keith will be remembered as a wonderful pastor. His common touch, his common sense and deep pastoral concerns for all those committed to his care were a mark of his entire ministry. He regarded them all as children of God to be treated with dignity and to be loved, respected and supported.

I sat in many meetings where Keith was the chair. Not only was he a very competent leader of meetings but his extempore prayers were always pertinent, masterful and eloquent. In fact there were two things I envied about Keith – one was his hair and the other was his ability to pray.

Throughout his long and distinguished ministry Keith made valuable contributions on the Heads of Christian Churches Committee, Standing Committee, Conference, Synod and Assembly meetings, and on other Boards and Councils too numerous to mention.

Keith’s preaching was always relevant, grounded in reality and delivered with complete conviction. The fire of the Gospel in the body, mind and soul of Keith never went out! He relied on the gift and power of the Holy Spirit to lead him through life; and he faced the issues of life with the poise and confidence that comes through faith. He sought no reward, medal or assurance other than that he was about his Lord’s work.

Keith’s faith and life were completely congruent. He was always clear about what God was looking for in the Church and he strove with every fibre in his body to ensure that the Church spoke out about injustice, that it showed forth its ecumenical Spirit and that the Synod along with its schools, missions and agencies were well governed.

Today we commemorate Keith’s life - a unique life of faithful ministry through the Methodist and the Uniting Churches; a thoughtful life of integrity, loyalty, devotion, courage, prayer, vitality and individuality.

The Gospel: Keith always took the opportunity to share the message that God’s love and grace are not only with us in life but in the life to come. And I want to follow his example.

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures make many promises about the future. The psalmist says that though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God will be with us and that his rod and staff will comfort us. St. Paul makes it clear that nothing in the world will be able to separate us from the love of God – not even death. And St. John tells us that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and will receive us unto himself so that we will be where he is.

Today, the Spirit of Keith Smith lives on in each one of us, and more particularly, it lives on in the members of his family. His faith, integrity, heart for justice, love and compassion, enthusiasm and encouragement can live on in each one of us.



Found in the History
Centre

From time to time, we will share some of the treasures that can be found at the History Centre.

The photos, books, records, artefacts, ... that are at the centre provide an interesting and exciting glimpse of the distant and not so distant past of church history. If you haven’t visited for a look recently, why not drop in sometime.



This photo of the church in Solomontown (near Port Pirie), South Australia.

The photo is undated. Information on the back of the photo suggests it was taken/produced by H. Langford and came from a collection from Rev. J. A. Andrews.

Notice the hand colouring of the lawn and some of the flowers in the garden beds.

If anyone has more information about this photo, the church, or Rev. Andrews, feel free to let us know here at the History Centre