



Uniting History SA August 2020

Guest Editor: David Houston

'A Visionary and a True Friend...' **William Fulton (Bill) Salter (1912-2006)**

This is how an ever-grateful former Hillcrest Hospital patient described Dr Bill Salter at his Memorial Service held in Brougham Place Uniting Church on Saturday, 9 September 2006. Doug G. was paying tribute to the life and work of a psychiatrist who transformed Northfield (later named Hillcrest) Mental Hospital from a place of lockdown and constraint into a community of care, and a place of friendship and partnership between patients, staff and volunteers. He brought about changes that enabled patients rediscover healthy mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. He laid the groundwork for the organised chaplaincy in mental health settings that the Uniting Church has shared in since the 1960s.

Doug G., with many others, remembered him also as 'the father' of Recovery in South Australia beginning in 1963. It had begun in NSW in 1955, and later became known as GROW Australia in 1975. Recovery provided 'organised ready help' and sustained support towards mental wellness via regular weekly group meetings in local communities. (See their website.) Bill Salter used his experience in psychiatric medicine along with compassion and goodwill to help people 'recover' their best selves. As a Christian he understood the response of Jesus given to the young lawyer in the Luke 10 parable of the Good Samaritan, 'Who is my neighbour?'. That parable shaped his life.

Doctor William Fulton Salter was born at Angaston on 21st September 1912, the fifth of eight children of Fulton and Sarah Salter. He was educated at Scotch College and the University of Adelaide where he graduated with a medical degree in 1936. His



appointment as Medical Officer to Parkside Hospital in 1939 was cut short by the outbreak of World War II, the full duration of which, he served in the Army Medical Corps (Psychiatric Unit, Goulburn). In 1946 he went straight from the army to take up an appointment as Deputy Superintendent at Northfield (Hillcrest) Mental Hospital, and remained in this position until 1962, when he became

Superintendent continuing in that position until his retirement in 1977. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his service to psychiatry and mental health reform, the same year.

What did he find at Northfield ?... He found a world of patients regulated into 'the sodden routine of institutionalised care'. It was custodial and restrictive. He reported, 'It took five or so years for us to realise that we were making and allowing patients to be ... zombies who sat in one place, or who walked up and down, who never talked to each other and who never shared anything. It was a meaningless existence ... People were ... depersonalised by the treatment ... they were cut off from their friends and the people they knew – and contact with the outside world and each other was disapproved by implication.'



(continued page 2)

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.

The Centre at 44a East Avenue, Black Forest, is open on Wednesday afternoons from 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Please make an appointment before coming to visit.

(Other contact details can be found on page 2)

The UCA History Centre

Open Wednesdays 1 - 4 pm

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Black Forest

Website:

historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au

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You can receive this newsletter via email.

Send your email address to

office@ucsahistory.org.au

and we will send you our up-to-date news

and other items of interest.

Membership of the Society

Individual—1 year \$20

Individual—5 years \$80

Individual—Life \$250

Congregational—Life \$250

Contact the Centre for more
information.

(from page 1)

In 1946, with close to 1000 patients in his care, Bill Salter sought to humanise his interest in the sprawling hospital by visiting the wards on a bicycle with his friendly German Shepherd companion by his side. On his return in 1951 from a period of study in England where he obtained a Diploma in Psychological Medicine, he introduced new ideas about group therapy and the importance of interpersonal relationships. He took steps to liberalising the existing policy and giving the patients more freedom. He comments, 'To this end we started by unlocking some of the wards, and with great temerity, leaving them open'.

Jocelyn Preece's Obituary record (National Centre of Biography at ANU, reflects the transformation that took place. She said, '... [He] was leading the change from a custodial model of care of the mentally ill to a therapeutic model, introducing specialist training for psychiatric nurses in South Australia, the establishment of a world-class industrial therapy company in his hospital, and then promotion of the then controversial idea of alcoholism as a treatable disease. Against a background of post-war shortages, backlogs of demands on government expenditure, and a difficult administrative structure above him, William Salter led what can only be described as a revolution in the care of the mentally ill in South Australia.

Writing of the long struggle to build a chapel in the grounds of the Northfield Hospital in the face of the shortage of resources, Salter said, 'A mental hospital is a necessary evil. It may become a prison or a refuge; an institution to be feared or shunned, or a haven of friendliness with promise of a new life.'

Aided by the introduction in the mid-fifties of the new 'tranquilliser' drugs, and by the moral authority of his deep Christian conviction, Bill Salter was able to gradually build a community of people taking charge of their own recovery in an environment of mutual care and respect.

It began with a few doors being left unlocked, and grew steadily, as everybody, staff and patients, adjusted to the realisation that their roles had changed. The change did not come easily, especially to some of the staff, and it was in turning this opposition around that Salter's remarkable skill as a teacher and leader became apparent. Doug G. said of him during this period, 'If you go against the mainstream to do what your heart and mind tell you is the only thing you can do; if you regularly risk your reputation to really help a bunch of helpless and hopeless human beings, then you have courage. Bill Salter was a man of courage.'

Establishing a therapeutic community ... By 1961, when Dr Hammond, the new Director of Mental Health, issued his report to the South Australian government, condemning the archaic conditions at Parkside and Northfield, Dr Salter *had already* established at Northfield his 'therapeutic community'. The physical conditions of the institution were still the same, but what was happening among the people was very different and was drawing approving comment from all over Australia and even beyond.

How news of these changes reached outside the walls was through the publication, with Salter's encouragement, by the patients, of a magazine, later called *Revelation*. A second-hand printing press had been donated in rusty pieces and brought back to life by some of the brilliant people among the staff and inmates, and this soon became the centrepiece of a burgeoning Industrial Therapy Unit. With the magazine as a means of communication among patients, community spirit grew rapidly, as did a flourishing concert party, hobby clubs of all kinds and various sports teams, while underpinning it all was the routine of regular 'group therapy' meetings. He was a sportsman himself [a very good amateur boxer and Interschool Hockey player] so he used his experiences from individual and team sport to build confidence and personal skills in his patients. Through failures and successes they learned to grow - individually and together. [Bill is third from the left in the back row of this 1936 Adelaide Inter-varsity Hockey Team.]

(continued page 3)

(from page 2)



The groups he established became known as 'Recovery' groups. In 1963 under Dr Salter's guidance, the groups were established outside the hospital by people moving back into the community. In 1975 the program became known as GROW Australia, a national movement based in Sydney. Dr Salter became one of its Vice Presidents. It continues as an important network. Its website is worth visiting. Its history and objectives show it to be making an important contribution to the mental well-being of many Australians. The Twelve Steps for Recovery are clear, relevant and helpful for everybody. There are 180 GROW groups around Australia, including 19 active groups in South Australia.

Jocelyn Preece describes one further acknowledgement. ...The anthologies of the Recovery and Grow movements are based on the principles and steps toward sobriety of the A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous) Movement. Bill Salter helped to consolidate the transfer of the principles of Fr. Con Keough's inspired work. With these insights Salter realised, ahead of most of his contemporaries, that alcoholics were not, as he put it, 'just hopeless drunks', but people suffering from a disease that could be treated. This was a revolutionary idea in the early 1950s. Recognising that it would need to be promoted, he called together a small group of interested people, some from Alcoholics Anonymous and some from among his own patients, to form the 'S.A. State Committee on Alcoholism'. Twenty-five years later in 1981 he was still President of what had by then become the 'Foundation on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence'.

A Christian within a Workplace ... A final comment connects his discipleship in 'the world' with his participation in his local church family.

The 1969 Joint Commission leading up to Church Union in 1977, suggested that members should be '*...reaching out into the ordinary vocations of life, to exercise their ministry of oversight and leadership...*' Bill Salter typified this. He participated actively in the 'gathered' life of his Brougham Place congregation while at the same time being an eminent psychiatrist who spearheaded radical change in the management of mental illness in South Australia between 1951 and 1977.

And, this 'serving spirit' had gone before him. His great-grandfather, William Salter, who trained as a chemist, arrived from Exeter in Devon in 1839, moved to Angaston to begin farming sheep and cattle in 1844. He was a founding member and deacon of the Angaston Congregational church which he helped to build in 1861. His grandfather Edward was a deacon and treasurer of the same church during the 1880s, and his father Fulton

was Sunday School Superintendent there for many years in the early 1900s. His mother Sarah was a leading contributor to Church music and singing at the Angaston Church, across the Barossa Valley, and then in the 1920s at Brougham Place.

Bill's ministry at Brougham Place was to sing in Choir and to be involved in the formation and leadership of Bible study and Home Fellowship groups. One that he started in 1984 and led for many years still meets regularly. The Choir remembered his love of Church music by presenting special choral works at his Memorial Service.

The Rev. Phil Hoffman, Minister at Brougham Place from 1999 – 2004, shared two of his memories with me. He visited Bill regularly at Phillip Kennedy Centre Largs Bay where Bill had moved into residential care. The first one '*We regularly shared Communion in his room - and Bill would participate with great purpose ...they were special moments for him and for me*'. The second one. '*For many years, another faithful saint of Brougham, Stan Goodrich, would collect a motley assortment of friends of Bill's in his red combi van and drive them to Phillip Kennedy Centre for Bible study, which Bill, even then incapacitated and slurred of speech by a stroke, would LEAD. The group were all elderly, but united in their admiration and support of Bill.*'

Dr William Salter will be remembered with great respect, affection and gratitude by the many Adelaide families (within both the community and the Church) who have been and are still being touched by his outstanding work, his insight, vision, and humility.

Rev David Houston

Sources:

Angaston & Penrice Historical Society Inc. 2020

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Doug G., GROW (SA) Newsletter, October, 2006

GROW Mental Wellness Programs—web: grow.org.au

Jocelyn Preece, 'Salter, William Fulton (1912–2006)', Obituaries Australia, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. 2006

Members and Ministers at Brougham Place Uniting Church 2020

Trevor Schaefer: 'The Light upon the Hill' - a history of Brougham Place Uniting Church. 2008

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UCity—A New Expression of Christian Mission and Ministry



On March 8 this year UCity and the new City View Uniting Church community hosted a visit for members of the Society and members of local congregations to hear the story of the mission and service ministries now carried out at 43 Franklin Street. Building on 156 years of Christian mission and ministry to the City and the whole of South Australia from this historic address, a new journey has begun and another phase of Christian mission has

begun.

Peter MacDonald, Uniting Church ministry team member at UCity, and Andrew Robertson, minister of the new City View Uniting Church congregation located there, welcomed the sixty-five people gathered in the foyer... He walked us outside to see the way bricks from



the former Mission tower have been built into symbolic reminders of a past era. Then back into the foyer to note plaques and art pieces that reminded us of the music and worship tradition of the earlier years. Art pieces carrying sections of some of the pipes from the pipe organ catch your eye. The sun and heat screen from the ground to the top of the building on the northern and western walls carry joined linked images of the 1864, 1960 and 2020 Church and Mission buildings on this site. Peter used the impressive Lego model of the UCity building built by a year 9 Pedare College student to introduce us to the diverse functions it serves.

We visited the work spaces of the Uniting Communities areas of advisory, care and support services. We passed by the Lifeline Counselling Service with its well known

profile along with other contemporary and strategic services such as Street-Link for young people, New ROADS providing drug and alcohol rehabilitation – in all, twelve key community care programs. Visit the website to explore these areas of ministry.

Peter told us that over 1500 staff and volunteers support and engage with more than 74,000 South Australians each year through commitment and quality service delivery and advocacy.

I travelled in the lift to the second floor with three members of the City View congregation. They were residents recently settled in their apartments on the upper floors. They were keen to meet members from other congregations who had come to hear the story of their new congregation. The City View Church Service was to commence at 3 pm - so they had joined the group at 2 pm to hear the first part of the story telling. When we moved into their worship centre, Andrew Robertson described the congregation's infancy, yet its enthusiasm; its diversity and its vibrancy; its dreams and its visions. Three candles are placed in the centre of the community at every Sunday gathering. The first is lit affirming that they are together as the people of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The second is lit to celebrate their diversity in culture, life-experience and gifts for ministry; and the third is lit to remind them they are to be lights in the world in Jesus' name within the City.

The future of the Uniting Church at this location is looking very different. There is access to an incredible range of multi-use spaces. The congregation will build relationships with residents, employees, customers and our wider community around our beautiful city!

Visit the City View website and note what Andrew and his ministry team are doing in this new hub for Christian fellowship and witness. The former City Soul congregation has merged with City View now. They bring their experience to this expanding missional venture in the City.

With worship scheduled to begin, the History Society visitors moved to the third floor to an open community



(from page 4)

space where Peter showed us early photos, silent film and video story of the different projects and developments that emerged over the years – Adelaide Central Mission beginning in 1901, the Radio ministry through 5KA beginning in 1943, the new neo-Gothic church replacing the old church in 1960; the conferences, rallies and synod events held there over the next 40 years. This story now forms a part of a digital archive library that Uniting Communities has researched, gathered and now holds. It was a great moment to see people, and hear voices of earlier eras.

While afternoon tea was shared in this communal/fellowship space, Peter McDonald led small groups of 10-12 at a time to visit the NDIS Services and Accommodation areas on level four. These are quite amazing facilities offering space for disability movement with adjustable furnishings and equipment for individual needs ... With over 25 years' experience now in disability services, Uniting Communities works with people living with disability and their carers to provide professional and quality support, including assistance with shaping individual NDIS plans.

Our President, Dr. Judith Raftery thanked Peter and Andrew for the energy and interest they brought to telling the story of their vision for the future, and for the hospitality they had provided for all who had attended.

David Houston : Editor

History Centre Opening

The History Centre has re-opened for visitors on Wednesday afternoons—1:00pm to 4:00pm.

In re-opening there are few things that we need to do to keep everyone safe during these 'COVID times'.

As much as we would love to see you, if you are unwell, please stay home and come when you are feeling better.

If you would like to come to do some research, please call us on 8297 8472 to make an appointment—we need to ensure we have enough space for people, so we need to know who will be here at what time. These appointments will be made for half an hour (on the half hour).

All visitors will need to sign in when they arrive and provide us with some contact details (for contact tracing if the need arises). We have hand sanitiser for people to use.

We remember...

Dr. John Raftery died on 5 June 2020, and we continue to remember Judith and the wider Raftery family in their sad loss. While supporting John during his illness for almost two years, Judith, as our President, has continued to maintain her enthusiasm for the work of the Society, and when able provided purposeful leadership in its program over the past year.

Together with the wider community we remember John's particular contribution to the health and well-being of many South Australians. John was an academic - both a researcher and a teacher - with expertise in education and life-long learning. He was also a clinical psychologist and worked in private practice and in community organisations. His passion was for pursuing understandings of mental health and illness, and approaches to treatment, that recognised the broad social and political context of people's lives and the impact of that on their well-being. He had a particular interest in the post-war lives of World War Two veterans and prisoners of war, and their families, and the difficulties of traumatised refugees and asylum seekers trying to adjust to life in Australia. For the last decade of his working life, right up until he became ill, he worked with refugees and asylum seekers in collaboration with STTARS (Survivors of Trauma and Torture Assistance and Rehabilitation Service).

John was a life member of the Australasian Society for Traumatic Stress Studies and a member of the Clinical College of the Australian Psychological Society. His PhD on the post-war mental health of World War II veterans is published in *Marks of War: war neurosis and the legacy of Kokoda*. John Raftery. 2003. We give thanks for his compassion and commitment to the people for whom he cared. John was a friend in fellowship with Judith at Pilgrim Uniting Church on special occasions.

David Houston: Vice President UC(SA)HS



When the music in church changed

A Personal Memoir

For the first five decades of the 20th century the grand tradition of hymn singing prevailed in the majority of the Protestant churches of the Western world. There was one exception: those known as conservative evangelicals who sang choruses with catchy tunes intended to appeal to the unchurched who may be ready for conversion to Christ. For the rest nothing much had changed in 200 years. After WWII however, a new phenomenon emerged - the singing of new songs or hymns to become the centrepiece of worship deemed to be appropriate for contemporary times. This memoir is my story of how this change occurred.

SCENARIO ONE

On Sunday 3rd August 1958 fifty youth known in those days as bodgies and widgeys showed up at the Vardon Memorial Congregational Church in King's Park and after a meal attended evening worship. The youth group had planned and prayed for this day ever since their annual camp at Macclesfield back in June. Earlier that afternoon they went out in pairs and scoured the streets of Goodwood Road. They chatted with gang members on street corners and invited them to the church to hear how Jesus could change their lives for the better. Seemingly miraculously they showed up without really knowing what to expect - nor the hosts, as the realities of



engagement gradually dawned.

Given that Vardonites loved the traditional hymnody

preferred by liberal Protestants of the day, the big question was what to sing when your visitors only knew popular music? "Rock around the clock" had just topped the charts. For this first night and subsequently as many more from the streets (some actually homeless) turned up, the genre of music mostly resorted to was what was then called "Negro Spirituals". Examples were "Nobody knows the troubles I've seen" - "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" - "Down by the Riverside". That year "He's got the whole world in His hands" made it onto the hit parade and when sung several attendees said that they never knew that "He" was the loving God we were talking about. Along with jazzed up hymns, the spirituals were the favourites for evening worship. Somehow the African American singing tradition which blended personal salvation with the cry to be recognised in spite of social alienation struck a chord. This was music which resonated with the needs of that non-churched audience. Strangely, what suited best for a contemporary situation was ***different music from another time and culture.***

SCENARIO TWO

The next scene from 1964 could either be a Sunday night at Scots Presbyterian Church North Terrace or the Glenelg Congregational Church on Jetty Road. Both churches led the way in the next phase of contemporising church music. "Sunday Night at Scots" drew well over 300 people as did Glenelg Cong. Supper to follow was also crucial to the event.



The ministers of both churches (Ian Tanner and Michael Sawyer), together with John Bodycomb and

myself met regularly to plan and share ideas and resources. The common vision was that "modern" worship would motivate young adults to stay with the church because it was deemed relevant (a buzz word of the period) for an increasingly secularised society. Lurking in the background was Robinson's "Honest to God" which from 1963 resonated with those seeking a more credible personal faith in synch with movements for equality and justice.

The sixties was a revolutionary decade. The civil Rights Movement in the USA had fostered a rebirth of folk and protest music which interestingly included the re-adaptation of spirituals now affirming black pride and inspiring the movement for racial equality. This music expressed the revolutionary spirit of the times and spread across the Pacific and influenced much of what was sung in churches - as it did on North Terrace and Jetty Road.

In this phase other trends emerged such as ***new tunes to old words.*** A key source was the Light Music Group from the UK. Geoffrey Beaumont's "Jazz Mass" was an example. Jazzed up versions of great hymns somehow seemed to energise the old words for contemporary times. Then there were ***new words to old tunes.*** A favourite from Sydney Carter's "Songs of Faith and Doubt" was "Lord of the Dance" which used an old Shaker melody. These trends meant that the organ gave way to acoustic guitars. A new generation of soloists who played guitars were in great demand. When Rev. Rod Jepson was added to the Scots ministry team, he played the drums and horror of horrors for traditionalists, a band was formed with other instruments to accompany the singing. So far at these well-attended services, the structure and setting for worship remained largely unchanged. But not for long.

SCENARIO THREE

The Applecross Congregational church is the next scene where I began a ministry in 1966. Applecross pioneered in Perth what was called "Modern Music Worship" aimed primarily at youth and young

(continued page 7)

(from page 6)



adults. Another trend had emerged - **new words to contemporary popular songs.**

While still drawing on British sources such as “Dunblane Praises”,

Australians were also writing new

words using for example tunes by such groups as the “Beatles” and “The Seekers”. Adelaide’s Fred Wiseman’s lyrics was one good example.

Applecross worship was far more participatory: spatially it was set “in the round”, leadership was shared, a larger band was featured with several guitars, piano, trumpet and percussion. Applecross young people began to write their own lyrics which resonated with preaching expected to challenge and be “down to earth”. One guitarist boldly introduced an electric guitar. In 1967 Applecross was chosen to share its “modern music” in an ABC Encounter program called “Songs of Faith” presented as an example of how modern music was being used in churches across Australia.

The above scenarios chart how the music and words changed. Having first been derived entirely from external sources, within a decade new music and words were being composed and written by local Australians. In Adelaide in 1968 a key event occurred at Nunyara. A Celebrative Workshop gathered a new generation of musicians and writers who led the way to form vibrant contemporary worship in such places as Pirie Street (later Pilgrim), Marion and at Nunyara, Belair - thus begins the next phase of the story!

REFLECTION

The fifties witnessed a new social phenomenon - teenagers who wanted to break free from traditional expectations. They warmed to popular culture and began to have the economic power of increasing affluence. While some such as boddies openly rebelled, others representing a new class of tertiary-educated students who were increasingly ready to critique the social mores of the status quo. In response churches appointed full time “Youth Directors”. Local fellowships were connected across State and National levels. Combined youth rallies at the Tivoli Theatre were packed to the rafters. The voice of a younger generation was beginning to be heard.

While traditional worship, at first mostly in the evenings prevailed, it was not long before it dawned that the times required something different. Music was to symbolise what that difference was to be. Why? The church constituency mostly lived in a cultural bubble out of step with the rest of society. Modernising worship would be the simplest way to keep the younger generation in the church. Increasingly the gospel challenge included an emphasis on issues of peace and justice which was expected to appeal more to the unchurched baby boomer

generation. This was also in contrast to the “take-it-or-leave” evangelical guilt focused approach of the recent Billy Graham crusade of 1959.

Was there a distinctive theology? Generalisations are not easy, but there is evidence of a turn away from liberal piety or the conservative evangelical’s fascination with the metaphor of Jesus dying in our place to appease the wrath of God because of humanity’s sin. Fred Wiseman’s words for example drew more upon the *Christus Victor* metaphor which emphasised the cross and resurrection as manifesting a profound love which empowers people to cast off old lives and take a stand for peace and justice. This emphasis would have struck a chord with those who were horrified by Australia’s support for the Vietnam war, which was far more divisive in the church than was ever admitted. Movements for racial and sexual equality came together within a social gospel celebrated and expressed through contemporised worship.

When the music changed, the church as community changed. Worship was to a degree democratised, for ordained ministers had to heed the voice of the youth of the church. Participatory worship flowered as all the other ingredients of worship were adapted. But one cannot pretend—there could be considerable resistance. Many wanted to hold on so exclusively to traditional hymnody that contemporary services often had to be organised at different times and sometimes other places; after all, having worship “in the round” worked better in halls! This is rarely the case now, as most mainline churches readily integrate the continuing inflow of new music and lyrics into their worship. However, the great flowering of new music in the church from the 1970s onwards had its genesis in the early days recalled in this memoir. What will the future hold in store for the church of the new millennium?

Jonathan Barker

Can you help?

We have had a request that has come to us via email, from a retired police officer who, in 1975, was stationed at the Sandringham Police Station (in Melbourne, Victoria).

He and his wife are trying to trace some people they helped moved to Mount Gambier at the time to help them celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

Unfortunately they can’t remember the name of the couple. What they can remember is the husband of the couple was taking up a new position as a Pastor in Mount Gambier, and the surname of his wife was Couch. They moved into a house that could see a caravan park to the north.

If you can help, please get in touch with us at the History Centre, so we can pass on any information.

Sanitizing History
Published 29/06/2020
Posted by Rev. Sandy Boyce, Pilgrim Uniting Church Blog
Messages of Hope

This collation of reflections has been drawn together by Sandy for Pilgrim Church's June 'Messages of Hope' blog, and used here with her permission.



To everything, there is a season (Ecclesiastes 3)

The pulling down, removal and defacing of statues around the world has had mixed reactions – some applauding the eradication of statues of slave traders, some saying the statues need to be retained to remember our history. Toppling statues marks a break with the past, but makes it more difficult to learn from it, and to see how that past still shapes the present.

In 2017, when the statues of Governor Macquarie, Captain Cook and Queen Victoria were defaced, Bill Shorten suggested that additional plaques be made to indicate that contemporary thinking may have moved on. Indigenous Affairs Minister Ken Wyatt says, “Statues can remind us of things that were offensive. That’s a good thing. He also suggests some of the statues may be more valuable if an additional plaque is added to explain and honour a different perspective. That’s also a very good idea.” (Amanda Vanstone)

Similarly, Condoleezza Rice, former US Secretary of State and the first black woman to hold the position, has commented: “Don’t sanitize history by taking down monuments. I am a firm believer in ‘keeping your history before you’ and so I don’t actually want to rename things that were named for slave owners. I want us to have to look at those names and recognize what they did and to be able to tell our kids what they did and for them to have a sense of their own history. When you start wiping out your history, sanitizing your history to make you feel better it’s a bad thing.

“Erasing the past, however painful it may be to remember it, is a mistake. Imagine if the German government sought to have all the concentration camps from World War II

levelled to the ground. Wisely, they spend millions of dollars maintaining a visible reminder of a terrible past. It is right to say we should never forget the Holocaust. We need to be reminded just how terrible things can happen. We might be able to stop a repeat event. But how can we tell people to never forget something if we never told them of it in the first place?” (Amanda Vanstone)

Lea Ypi writes: Focusing only on whether statues should stay or go obscures how unjust histories are still borne by current structures. The struggle is broader than toppling offensive monuments and removing problematic traces of the past. If we scratch the surface, we may discover that since capitalism has historically relied on colonial structures to survive, it may be difficult to demand the end of one without demanding the end of the other.

Julia Baird’s article is worth reading. She writes: One of the more perplexing arguments made in recent days is that toppling, relocating or removing old statues amounts to the erasure of history. It is in fact the very opposite: it is history. To seek a fuller understanding of the past is not wrecking, but restoring, salvaging and deepening history. History is not just a set of facts but a series of questions, a mode of inquiry that seeks to comprehend and put flesh on dates, events and places, to understand and include all possible perspectives, all while knowing that, until about 50 years ago, history was almost solely written by white men, about white men. This history was comprised of flawed, incomplete and often deceptive stories that not only excluded vital records, but were frequently used for propaganda purposes, and the buffering of myths like: all war is good, mighty and noble, if somewhat sad; the expansion of empire was jolly impressive; all important people sat in parliament or courts; and women and non-white people have not done particularly much of note for millennia. What has happened to statues – rolled into harbours, set aflame on their plinths, defaced with graffiti, hung with signs – is merely the visible form of what historians have been quietly doing to the myths of the past for decades – documenting a more complete account. The time for a public reckoning with the ongoing legacy of slavery, the horrors of colonial expansion, and the fact that we have not considered violence against people of colour, or women, to be of particular note, has come. We need to stop thinking about history as a kind of binary “positive” or “negative”, as either nice or bad, but as something that reflects all of the wild chaos, dark violence, and glorious triumphs of humanity; the story of all of us.

The story of all of us.

What might this look like in considering the history and practices of the Church, and as we consider the Biblical narrative – the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian

(from page 8)

Scriptures? What have we preferenced, and ‘placed on a pedestal’. What has been overlooked? What do we name, reframe, ‘tear down’, read or do differently? The following insights come from an article by Gretta Vosper in which she reflects on Jesus and Martin Luther (though the same lens could be used for other reformers). A part of what she writes:

Both Jesus and Luther honoured their traditions. Though we long assumed Jesus was Christian, we now know he wasn’t; he was a Jew. Luther learned the only acceptable religion of his day, a Rome-centred Catholicism. They were steeped in their traditional religions, born into and formed by them. Like everyone around them, they were supposed to fit in. Their education, far above the level of the average believer, was supposed to further hone their beliefs. It was not supposed to expose the little hypocrisies and gross abuses that had been so artfully woven into the everyday business of religion. Once noticed, however, the normal way of doing things became unacceptable. There were no options for Jesus or Luther but those that would bring about catastrophic change in their religious traditions. Even as others fought to maintain the status quo, forcing banishment or conspiring toward more final solutions, the Reformers laid out and presented their arguments. And the world changed.

We stand on the shoulders of great men and women. Countless Reformers dared challenge the norms of their day – religious, political, economic, and social. And they did it at great cost. We are grateful to them for their struggles, for their lives, for their blood, and for the first discomfort noticed that set them on their course. They created the world in which we live, the freedoms we cherish, the perspectives we are welcome to embrace or refuse, the right to make our own decisions, whether wise or foolish. They set in course the possibilities from which we have chosen our new realities and so have become, with them, co-creators of the world we know.

They also, however, created gross disparities and abuses that yet plague humanity and the planet: the economic enslavement of whole nations for the provision of privileges assumed by others; the legal jargons that entrap indigenous peoples in politically ritualized battles for sovereignty; the lines that set out who is worthy of the right to choose their own lifestyle and who is not; the notion that humanity is separate and above the natural world rather than enfolded within and vulnerable to it; the entertainments by which we anaesthetize ourselves to the truths that quake around us; the cruelties endured by herded, caged, and crated animals so we might pleasure our taste buds and soothe our sun-scarred skin. And we, in making our choices, remain co-creators, complicit in a litany of normals that, had we the heart of Jesus or Luther or the millions of unnamed men and women who have poured their lives out in the pursuit of justice and compassion and the building up of love in the world, would make every one of us a Reformer.

There is a legacy in the Reformation that I believe belongs in the middle of our work, calling out the power brokers, the hegemonists, the deceivers. Ours is not the work of complacency or settling for imperatives that take decades

to conjure only because it takes that long to soothe the sensitivities of those still wielding ecclesial powers that make no difference to the challenges facing our world. Our reforms must be much bolder, our work in the world more creative than what those beyond our walls believe is all we do. It may be that humanity is facing the greatest crises of its too-brief history as it reels with the challenges of global warming and climate change, exponential population growth, and resource depletion. There may be no future moment for us to step up. Now may be all there is. Literally.

Change is our very birthplace. It is our right and responsibility as heirs of the Reformers, to stare down every comfortable “normal” that sings its siren song and refuse to be enchanted by it. It is our right and responsibility to count up every ease and privilege we enjoy and educate ourselves about its source – what makes it possible? Who pays for our pleasures and how? And when we find that “normal” is built on the subjugation of others – our tea, our chocolate, our party-ready shrimp rings – work to redistribute or limit those pleasures until all have access to shelter, security, food, clean water, and the joy of planning for their children’s futures.



Plagues, pandemics and the church

The Christian church has a long association with responses to disease, infirmity and other threats to good health. Indeed, the language in which its central religious message has been couched – salvation, wholeness, abundant life, taking up one’s bed and walking, seeing rather than being blind, being clean rather than being unclean – is also the language of health, well-being and flourishing. And of course Jesus’ reputation as a healer was key to his capacity to draw people to him and to transform their understandings of what it meant to set straight their relationships with God and with others.

Over the centuries, the church’s connection with health has developed in a variety of ways. Christian communities have established places of sanctuary, hospitality and rest for pilgrims and people in need, they have founded hospitals and religious orders committed to nursing and healing, and they have pioneered services and accommodation for the elderly and frail in need of special care. Health services have often been central to the work of Christian missions, providing entrée and credibility to missionaries working in cultural settings very different from their own.

What the church can achieve through any of these developments depends on what other sections of society, especially government, see as their role – what gaps they fill and leave; what understanding they have of the extent of their responsibility for the well-being of individuals and of the community as a whole. What the church can achieve also depends on how it understands its role, what theological perspectives prevail within it, and what capacity it has to command community respect and lead community thought and action. And that, of course, has varied enormously at different times throughout history.

As I’ve had my life changed, in ways that I could not have previously imagined, by the coronavirus pandemic, I’ve thought about the role of the church in relation to this massive challenge to our health. And I’ve found it instructive to revisit a remarkable story that emerged from an earlier pandemic: bubonic plague or the ‘Black Death’, that ravaged Europe in the seventeenth century. This story has been vividly brought to life by Geraldine Brooks, in her book *Year of Wonders*, a fictionalised but truth-bearing account of one community’s response to that deadly visitation, and the role the church played in that response.¹

The story is set in Eyam (pronounced ‘Eem’) a village in Derbyshire, England. Eyam and its environs – an area of farms, villages and small towns, remote from large centres of population – were free of bubonic plague until 1665 when an itinerant tailor arrived from London, took up residence in the village, and made clothes for the villagers from the supply of cloth he had brought from the metropolis. Tragically, one bolt of

cloth was infected with the plague and, as a consequence, Eyam was soon engulfed by fear and grief as the Black Death cut a swathe through its population. In this appalling and poorly understood situation, a young clergyman, the Rev. Michael Mompellion, convinced the villagers to make an extraordinary choice: they quarantined themselves in order to contain the plague within their boundaries and stop its spread to the surrounding areas. With no directives from government or even from the wider church authorities, he guided the residents of Eyam through a comprehensive lock-down of non-essential services and activities, and implemented social distancing into worship services, with the aid of a natural amphitheatre. These precautions, which were of course not referred to by those now-familiar terms, had mixed success. A year later, when the plague had run its course, two thirds of the villagers were dead, but the rest of Derbyshire remained plague-free.

Year of Wonders chronicles what happened during that extraordinary year. The best and the worst of human behaviour were on display. Alongside selfless, risk-taking love and care, which brought comfort, if not always healing, to the afflicted, were examples of gross selfishness, exploitation and profiteering. At a time when disease processes were little understood, conspiracy theories quickly emerged and frightened folk took ghastly retribution against demonised groups whom they were quick to blame for the ills besetting Eyam. Fear and ignorance fed off each other. In this highly-charged situation the Rev. Mompellion preached a fervent message. The plague was not, as many villagers and less liberal church leaders believed, the work of the Devil or a punishment from God; rather it was an opportunity – perhaps sent by God? – to demonstrate real faith in Christ like love. He had little time for a theology that embraced suffering because of the blessing that could come through it, and in the end his sermons and his pastoral care were about courage and resolve, and about being alongside those who suffered. We might not find his theology compelling and might align ourselves more closely with that of Anna, the story’s narrator, who concluded:

Why should this thing be either a test of faith sent by God, or the evil working of the Devil in the world? One of these things we embraced, the other we scorned as superstition. But perhaps each was false, equally. Perhaps the Plague was neither of God nor the Devil, but simply a thing in Nature, as the stone on which we stub a toe.²

Of course we might also wonder whether Anna’s analysis went far enough. Perhaps we should question the thinking that sees ‘Nature’ as an uncomplicated source of troubles? Perhaps we edge closer to a truer understanding if we consider how our political and economic decisions and priorities might collude with

Updates from the Uniting Church National History Society

2020 Annual General Meeting

The National Society's next Annual General Meeting will be held online via Zoom on Thursday 10 September commencing at 4:00pm (AEST). Those members who have email will be sent an invitation with instructions on how to use Zoom and join the meeting a few days before hand.

Annual Public Forum

The Annual Public Forum will be held online via Zoom following the AGM commencing at 7:00pm (AEST) on Thursday 10 September.

Sarah Lim, Janice McRandal and Shurlee Swain have all agreed to be part of a panel to discuss the current work of UCA Redress (established to address issues arising out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Abuse) and theological and historical perspective on the churches' involvement in child sexual abuse in its institutions.

Third Biennial Conference



The Third Biennial Conference of the Society will be held at

The Centre for Ministry,
North Paramatta, New South Wales

11–13 June 2021

The theme is “Growing Up Uniting”.

Mark it in your diary. More details to come over coming months.

‘Nature’ to engender global catastrophes.

At the end of their Plague year the people of Eyam remained divided over whether Mompellion's strategy had been vindicated, and readers of *Year of Wonders* might be similarly divided. However, one thing is very clear: the church emerged in that crisis as *the* authority, able to exert a significant level of control and to command a significant degree of public obedience. It faced no competition from government, or from scientific or medical establishments. Its competitors were fear and traditional beliefs, and it was able to at least modify the effects of these. The church in the current age of COVID-19 is in a very different situation. Its historic connections to health matters notwithstanding, it neither sees itself as, nor is seen by others as, the expert or the authority in relation to curbing the pandemic. If it has developed new theological insights in response to ‘the virus’, it has done so in an environment in which the vast majority of the citizenry have no expectation of anything of value or practical use emerging from the church, let alone from theology. So what has its role been? I think, based on the evidence of the part of the church with which I'm acquainted, that it has done at least the following:

- It has heeded the science that is the basis of the pandemic policies of our governments and health authorities.
- It has modelled and spoken up for compassion and responsibility for the well-being of others.

- It has criticised and exposed the inadequacies and dangers of narrow, rights-based arguments about personal freedoms.
- By rejecting racism, xenophobia and conspiracy theories, it has resisted vilifying and demonising people whom others have been quick to blame for the current crisis.
- It has brought comfort and hope even when it cannot bring cure or immunity.

In other words, it has exercised responsible citizenship and a culture of care alongside other groups and people of like mind. That seems to me to be a significant contribution to our communal well-being, and fitting behaviour for people committed to pursuing abundant life for all.

Judith Raftery

¹ Geraldine Brooks, *Year of Wonders: a novel of the Plague*, Fourth Estate, London, 2001

² Brooks, *Year of Wonders*, p.215

2020 Calendar of Events

December newsletter

The next newsletter will be published and sent to members in early December.

Wednesday 9 December

The History Centre closes on this day for our break over Christmas and New Year.

We will reopen on Wednesday 3 February 2021.



2021 Calendar of Events

Planning for 2021 has begun, and we would love to hear from you if you have any thoughts or ideas for ways we could gather to celebrate history, and to learn more about the history of the Uniting Church (and the precursor denominations).

Please send your ideas to the Centre, or any member of the council (details on page 2 of the newsletter).



The Modern Christian Music Movement of the 1960s

Rescheduled for 19-21 March 2021

Readers will want to note this event in their 2021 diaries. It will present the program envisaged for 19-21 September 2020 but cancelled due to Covid19 restrictions. It will include the following -

- Friday, 19 March 2021 at The Church of the Trinity, Goodwood Road, commencing at 7.30pm - The UC(SA) Historical Society's public meeting exploring 'Developments in The Modern Christian Music and Hymnody from the 1960s to 2020' with a panel of key contributors;
- Saturday, 20 March 2021 at Pilgrim Church, Flinders Street CSG reunion and sharing, and the launch of Douglas Simper's new song book, *'Singing the Journey'* on Saturday afternoon and evening; and,
- A related Occasional Series event at Blackwood UC on Sunday afternoon.

More detail and publicity will follow in the next few months.

Insights and Recollections: Members of the First UCA Assembly held in Sydney in June 1977.

The Third Biennial conference of the National UCA Society will be held at the Centre for Ministry, North Parramatta, N.S.W 11-13 June 2021. The theme chosen for papers and conversation will be "Growing Up Uniting". I am currently undertaking research on the background and recollections of those who were members of the first Assembly held in Sydney June 1977. Forty-three years ago 216 members were present including 70 from each of the three denominations and six from the United Church of North Australia. If you are interested in this topic I can send you a summary of the research to date including the names of those who were present, the denomination and the state they represented. Your thoughts and recollections about the first UCA Assembly will be an important contribution to the study.

Rev. Dr Dean Eland
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At the AGM we conveyed our appreciation to Mrs. Barbara Hayes and the Rev. Doug Hosking as they retired from the Council. Barbara has made an important contribution in helping to prepare, set up and co-curate the Annual History Month displays presented over a number of years, more recently at Scots Church Hall in North Terrace. Doug served both the Society's Council and Executive as Secretary in a very committed and efficient way. We also acknowledged again the enthusiastic work of Rev. Lindsay Faulkner who died in 2019.