

Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting

HEARTS ON FIRE

Devotional

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16 NIV)

9th June - 18th July 2015

Devotional for 40 days of prayer and fasting before and during National Assembly of Uniting Church held in Perth 11th-18th July.

Cover letter from President-Elect Uniting Church in Australia,

Stuart McMillan

for Sacred Season of Prayer and Fasting 2015

Greetings Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The 14th Assembly is approaching fast and I hope whether you are a member of the Assembly or a member of our church you will join us in prayer, throughout the 40 days of the Sacred Season of Prayer. You can also follow the Assembly through social media and the web site which will assist your prayers and I hope your sense of connection to the gathering, as the people of God.

Uniting Prayer and Fasting have been faithfully calling intercessors to prayer during the last triennium on each occasion when the Assembly Standing Committee has met and throughout this period for particular concerns the Assembly Officers may advise.

My firm belief is that the purposes and plans of God through his people must be saturated in prayer and so I value this ministry tremendously. I know that a resource is being produced and that past Presidents have contributed to it and I commend it to you.

Lastly let me say that one of the things I believe we require to face the issues of the day is a spirit of generosity. This seems at odds with ever tightening budgets, but I am convinced that God's ways are not the ways of the world and as the Spirit moves among us growing a spirit of generosity we will be amazed at what God will bring about.

So friends, as you enter into a season of prayer, thank you and may the Holy Spirit enflame your passion for God's purposes through the Church.

Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart McMillan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Stuart McMillan
President-elect
15th May 2015.

Covering Letter by Incoming President Stuart McMillan

Introduction and acknowledgements

- Day One 9th June:** “*Let there be light*” Genesis 1:1-2; 14-19
Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki National Chair of ACC.
- Day Two 10th June:** “The flaming sword part one”: Genesis 3:1-6; 21-24
Colette Williams - South Australia
- Day Three 11th June:** “*The flaming sword*” Part 2: Genesis 3:1-6; 21-24
Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission, New South Wales
- Day Four 12th June:** “*The Burning bush*” Ex 3:1-6
Nelson Varcoe, Adelaide Congress, South Australia
- Day Five 13th June:** “*Fire by night*” Ex 13:17-22; Ex 14:19-25
Barrie Robinson, Tasmania
- Day Six 14th June:** “*Descending in Fire “ Part One:* Ex 19:16-23
Rev Dr. Alan Russell New South Wales
- Day Seven 15th June:** “*Descending in Fire “ Part 2:* Ex 19:16-23
Sitiveni Faupula. ACC Tonga
- Day Eight 16th June:** “*A Consuming fire*” Exodus 24:15-17; Deut 5:22-29;
Is 33:13 Rev Dean Whittaker Adelaide Congress ,
Assistant Coordinator Uniting Prayer and Fasting
- Day Nine 17th June:** “*A Radiant face*”: Exodus 34:29-35
Rev (Aunty) Dorothy Gordon Harris. Elder UAICC Congress
- Day Ten 18th June:** “*Fire and the tabernacle*” Numbers 9:15-23; 2 Chron 7:1-3
Annette Blaze , Victoria
- Day Eleven 19th June:** “*Judgement and Fire*” Num11:1-3; 16: 1-7; Is 66:15-17;
Anne Hibbard; Coordinator of Uniting Prayer and Fasting
- Day Twelve 20th June:** “*Humility and fire (part one)*”: Psalm 18: 25-28
Rev Ron Brookman New South Wales
- Day Thirteen 21st June:** “*Humility in Fire Part Two*” Psalm 18: 25-28
Sitiveni Faupula. ACC Tonga
- Day Fourteen 22nd June:** “*An Answer in fire*”: 1 Kings 18:30-39
Rev Stephen Larkin, Nedlands Uniting Church, Western Australia.
- Day Fifteen 23rd June:** “*Chariots of fire*”: 2 Kings 2:9-13 ; 2 Kings 6:15-17
Ps. Sital Sanjivi, Hindi Pastor, Liverpool Uniting, New South Wales
- Day Sixteen 24th June:** “*His Word like fire “*: Jeremiah 20:7-12:
Rev Dr Robert Brennan Queensland
- Day Seventeen 25th June:** “*A new heart*” Ezekiel 1:4-13; Ezekiel 7:16-22.
Sepi Haumono. Peniel Tongan Uniting Church, NSW
- Day Eighteen 26th June:** “*God with us in fire*” Daniel 3:16-29 : Isaiah 43:1-2
Bella Hibbard, New South Wales
- Day Nineteen 27th June:** *Repentance, Saved from fire* : Joel 2:3-5; 12-17; 28-32
Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission, NSW
- Day Twenty 28th June:** *Wall of fire* : Zechariah 2:5; Isaiah 60:1-2
Barrie Robinson, Tasmania

- Day Twenty one 29th June:** *In the beginning* , John 1:1-5; John 3:16-21
Rev Prof James Haire AC Past President of the Uniting Church
- Day Twenty two 30th June:** *Baptized with fire* Luke 3:15-17,
Rev Dr Dean Drayton, Past President of the Uniting Church
- Day Twenty three 1st July:** *Flickering flames:* Matthew 12:18-21
Jill Tabart. Past President of the Uniting Church
- Day Twenty four: 2nd July:** *Salted with fire:* Mark 9:44-50 Rev Dean Whittaker and
Pastor Lloyd Hollingsworth
- Day Twenty five: 3rd July:** *Keep your lamps burning:* Lk 12:35-36; Matt 25:1-13:
Joe Stuurman, Elder of Zillmere Congress, Queensland
- Day Twenty six: 4th July:** *Fire on the earth:* Luke 12:49-53
Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission, NSW
- Day Twenty seven: 5th July:** *Judgment, abiding and fire* John 15: 1-9:
Rev Anne Hibbard, Coordinator of Uniting Prayer and Fasting
- Day Twenty eight: 6th July** *The sun stopped shining :* Luke 23:44-49
Rev Alistair Macrae Past President Uniting Church in Australia
- Day Twenty nine: 7th July** *Fire on the beach:* John 21:1-14
Rev Ron Brookman, Ramsgate Uniting, NSW
- Day Thirty: 8th July** *Hearts on fire:* Luke 24:13-35; Ephesians 1:18
Rev Dr Robert Brennan, Queensland
- Day Thirty One: 9th July:** *Tongues of fire:* Acts 2:1-21
Rev Dr Dean Drayton, Past President of the Uniting Church
- Day Thirty Two: 10th July** *Met by fire - Saul's conversion :* Acts 26:12-18
Rev Dr Dean Drayton, Past President of the Uniting Church
- Day Thirty Three: 11th July** *Tested by fire:* 1 Cor 3:10-17
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- Day Thirty Four: 12th July** *Transformed in fire:* 2 Cor 3:7-18;
Colette Williams, South Australia
- Day Thirty Five: 13th July** *Discerning the fire:* 1 Thess 5: 19-22; 1 Jn 4:1-4 ;
2 Tim 1:4-6; Pastor (Uncle) Bill Hollingsworth, First Nation Elder
and past chair of Congress who signed the covenant with Jill Tabart.
- Day Thirty Six: 14th July:** *Refined by fire – Scrambled Squadron:* 1 Pet 1:3-9;
Pastor (Uncle) Bill Hollingsworth. First Nation Elder
- Day Thirty Seven: 15th July:** *Consuming fire :* Heb 12:18-29
Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission, NSW
- Day Thirty Eight: 16th July** *Disciplined in fire* Rev 3:14-22
Fiona Blair, Pastor Avalon Beach Village Church,
Advanced Candidate, (MOW).
- Day Thirty Nine: 17th July** *Coming in fire:* Rev 19:11-15; 2 Thess 1:6-10
Rev Ron Brookman, New South Wales
- Day Forty: 18th July** *The Lamb is its lamp* Rev 22:9-27
Rev Dr Dean Drayton, Past President of Uniting Church

Appendix 1: Letter from General Secretary Rev Terrence Corkin with prayer
Points and suggestions

Appendix 2: Proposals coming to 14th Assembly as of 30th May

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to “Hearts on Fire”, a devotional booklet prepared by Uniting Prayer and Fasting to aid in prayers for the Uniting Church in Assembly in Perth 2015. “Hearts on Fire” was chosen by the incoming President of the Uniting Church, Stuart McMillan as the theme for the 14th Assembly. Uniting Prayer and Fasting is using this theme to help Uniting Church members pray for the Lord Jesus Christ’s work in the Church and Assembly in the lead up to the Assembly.

This devotional booklet has 40 readings relating to “fire” throughout Scripture. 20 of these readings are from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) , 10 in the Pentateuch, and 10 in the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. There are 20 readings in the New Testament, 10 from the gospels and 10 from the rest of the New Testament. These readings follow systematically from Genesis to Revelation.

Each day has a bible reading, key verse, a short passage from the Uniting Church’s founding document “The Basis of Union”, a reflection of the passage from a Uniting Church member, a prayer and prayers points to help pray for the Uniting Church and our partners, and a photo or picture.

May the fire of the good news of Christ, the risen crucified One set our hearts ablaze through these forty days and beyond, that we may confess Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father”
(based on Basis of Union Par 3)

Rev Anne Hibbard (Coordinator Uniting Prayer and Fasting)

COPYRIGHT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Lord Jesus Christ for the vision, empowerment and strength to bring this devotional book together.

Thankyou to the incoming President of the Uniting Church for his covering letter and General Secretary Rev Terence Corkin for prayer points.

REFLECTIONS : Thankyou to all of the Uniting Church members who have written such excellent reflections. Including

Four past Presidents: Jill Tabart, Rev Alistair Macrae, Rev Dr Dean Drayton and Rev Prof James Haire

Members of Congress and Congress congregations: Nelson Varcoe (song), Rev Dean Whittaker, Aunty (Rev) Dorothy Gordon Harris; Joe Stuurman (artwork), Uncle Bill Hollingsworth, Lloyd Hollingsworth.

Uniting Church ministers and members throughout Australia:

Dr Hedley Fihaki, Colette Williams, Ps Andy Collins, Barrie Robinson, Sitiveni Faupula, Rev Dr Alan Russell; Sitevi Faupula; Annette Blaze; Rev Anne Hibbard; Rev Ron Brookman; Rev Stephen Larkin; Ps Sital Sanjivi; Rev Dr Robert Brennan; Sepi Hamono; Bella Hibbard; Fiona Blair.

PHOTOS: Thank you to Rev Dean Whittaker for the cover photo and others. Also thank you to Darcy Whittaker (Macclesfield UCA) and Louise Macdonald who works closely with Aboriginal folk in Jabiru (and is wife of Rev Lindsay Parkhill - *West Arnhem Area Ministry Council Support Worker/ Minister Jabiru*).

ARTWORK: Thank you to our two artists who have included artwork “*Jumping through the Fiery Doona*” by **Amber Whittaker** , “*Special Virgins*” by **Joe Stuurman**

DAY 1. 9th June “Let there be light” Genesis 1:1-2; 14-19
Rev. Dr. Hedley Fihaki, Queensland, National Chair of ACC.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:3-4 NIV)

Basis of Union: “built upon the One Lord Jesus Christ” (paragraph 3)

We begin our 40 days of prayer and fasting reflecting on the unique fact that creation as a whole was ‘called’, not evolved, into existence out of ‘nothing’ by God’s living and active Word (Creation Ex nihilo). God speaks His Word and life comes into being! Life begets life! Life cannot come from non-life.

In the same way, the Church, like the people of Israel, was called into existence out of nothing; “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Peter 2: 10). In other words, we are dependent fully on God’s faithfulness to His Word expressed in the Covenant, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 5: 7).

To try and live and work outside this framework, is to risk returning to nothingness, darkness and death. Jesus said “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8: 12). To ensure that we fulfill our mission as the Uniting church, i.e. to be a ‘light of God’s salvation to the ends of the earth’ (Isaiah 49: 6), Davis McCaughey’s words are worth noting regarding the ‘primacy of the Word in the life of the Church’: “In approaching the doctrine of the ministry and the ordering or government of the life of the Church we are conscious of the need to remember that questions of faith precede those of order. Put it another way. The Gospel does not depend upon ministers, ministers are dependent upon, derive their authority from the Gospel. Moreover the doctrine of the Church precedes logically and theologically the doctrine of ministry”.¹ “That must always be so, for the church is the creation of the gospel, called into being by the gospel and given shape by the gospel. If order is divorced from faith, what then determines the order of the church? Expediency? The structures of big business? What its members think would be most efficient?”²

The *faith* of Church, in other words, is not a series of human aspirations. That is, it is not dependent on the will of men and women. It is, as our Basis of Union put it, “built upon the One Lord Jesus Christ” (para. 3), the Word of God.

When we ponder on the power of God’s Word, we find ourselves saying these words and experiencing this reality, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24: 32).

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, may you set our “Hearts on Fire” as you continue to speak to us and purify us through your Word, for your honour and glory alone. In Jesus name. Amen.

Pray for: a) The Persecuted Church in Asia; especially North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan
b) Ministry of Assembly of Confessing Congregations

¹ McCaughey, D. “Forward Together: On What Basis?” in Essays on the Basis of Union in the Uniting Church. Edited by Rev. Dr. Max Champion (1994) Forum Booklets No. 6. p.17. Published by The Forum on Faith and Society.

² The Status, authority and role of the Basis of Union within the UCA. Advisory Group on Church polity 1995.

**DAY 2. 10th June *The flaming sword part one:* Genesis 3:1-6; 21-24
Colette Williams - South Australia**

After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 18. "The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life,"

Into the scene of perfect creation, innocence, and close intimacy with God, comes the first and fatal sign of evil. God had given Adam and Eve free access to the garden he'd planted, and he'd made it beautiful, pleasing to the eye, and life-giving – a gift of abundance. And there was just one restriction: "...you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (2:17) They didn't need to discern good and evil, because up until that time, living in perfect harmony and obedience to God, there was no evil. But that was soon to change...

The serpent sows a seed of doubt in Eve's mind, "Did God *really* say...?" But in her response, Eve misquotes God, adding a prohibition that he never intended, "...and you must not touch it..." Immediately she's on shaky ground. The serpent directly contradicts God's clear and unequivocal warning with, "You will not surely die." He then follows up with a half-truth, attributing wrong motives to God. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." And so, ignoring the word of God, and being influenced by lies, deceptions, half-truths and self-interest, Eve took that step that would reverberate through history. She ate, and she gave some to her husband. Their eyes were indeed opened, and for the first time they understood shame. But they were not like God.

There were dire consequences to this single act of rebellion. Humanity became mortal, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, with the flaming sword in place to prevent their return. And that downward spiral of sin and disobedience has continued through the generations, requiring an unimaginable act of sacrifice by God to restore us to a relationship with him. As a Church, and as individual Christians, it is vital that we continue to uphold the primacy of God's word in everything we do, and in every decision we make for the kingdom. We must hide his word in our hearts, so that we don't sin against God. (Ps.119:11) Satan, the liar and deceiver, is still preying on Christians, and if we don't know what the Word of God really says, we will be easy victims. (John 8:44 & 1 Peter 5:8)

Prayer.

Lord, we thank you for the life-giving power of your Word, and its ability to bring us timeless truth, to transform, and to show us the way forward. We pray that in this time of preparation, and in all the business of the Assembly, your Word will continue to shed its light and to guide your people in all things. Amen.

Pray for: a) Persecuted Church in the middle East - especially Iraq and Syria, Iran
b) Synod of South Australia

DAY 3: 11th June The flaming sword Part 2: Genesis 3:1-6; 21-24

Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission, New South Wales

After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24 NIV)

B of Union: Pa 4 “Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist

Okay, we know the end of the story, don't we? As a good ole Southern Baptist chorus declares, “*I've read the back of the book and we win!*” But still, isn't this the most heart-wrenching verse in the early chapters of Genesis?

Powerful angels and a deadly sword strategically placed to keep Adam and Eve from having access to the tree of life. How quickly things have spiraled downhill. Virtually free access to God and anything else in the Garden. And with them, blessings of fruitfulness and abundance declared over their lives. All gone because of an exchange involving Eve, a talking serpent and a forbidden piece of fruit. The price of sin is costly indeed!

God's wonderful plan for His creation was good. Very good! How it must have grieved Him then to have to make things much more difficult for humanity. Declaring instead that life would become one of pain, trial and hard, fruitless work. Cold comfort to be given coats by God: they did little to cover up the shame they now felt.

Verses 21-24 of Genesis 3 are much lesser-known passages than those in the earlier part of the chapter. Here, God dresses Adam and Eve, declares a death sentence on them, and sends them off to a life of hard toil.

If they aren't left wondering whether God will change His mind and let them back in. Mighty cherubim appear, strong and powerful enough to prevent re-entry to the Garden of Eden and access to the Tree of Life. If they should evade the angels, they had no hope against a slashing sword in perpetual motion, ready to take them to an early grave.

Aren't you glad to be living post-Resurrection Sunday? That costly price for sin has been paid in full. Partway through writing this, I spent a wonderful couple of hours in prayer.

As I reflected on Genesis 3:21-24, I rejoiced as I considered how very fortunate we are. No longer in exile from God, wondering if God will change His mind and have mercy on us (Eph 2:1-10). We have the promise that God is always near (Phil 4:5). Blessings of fruitfulness and abundance once again declared over our lives (see John 10:10; 15:5,8,16). We can approach Him freely and confidently (Eph 3:12 and Heb 4:16), and have confidence that He longs to give good things to His dear children (Matt 7:11). And our prayers to Him are like sweet smelling incense before His very throne (Rev 5:8)!

To quote another beautiful hymn of praise “*The wonder of wonders, oh how could it be, That God became flesh and was given for me. The Almighty came down and walked among men. The wonder of wonders, He died for my sin.*”

Prayer: *Father God, how grateful I am that You are rich in mercy. As I reflect on how much our sin hurts You, I am full of awe and wonder that You have made a way for me to come back to You. Lord Jesus, the price You paid was great, but You were so willing to pay it. Holy Spirit, give me the grace, power and words to declare the praises of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous life. In Jesus' name, I pray. AMEN.*

Pray for: a) The Persecuted Church in Africa - especially Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria

b) Give thanks for the faithful service of many in the Uniting Church over the last three years and particularly those who will mentioned in minutes of appreciation at Assembly

Retiring President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney; Retiring General Secretary, Rev Dr Terence Corkin;

Ms Maureen Postma (Christian Unity Working Group); Rev Dr David Pitman (Worship Working Group)

Rev Dr Kerry Enright (UnitingWorld); Dr Sureka Goringe (UnitingWorld)

Rev Gale Hall (Defence Force Chaplaincy; Rev Seforosa Carroll (Wokring Group on Relations with other Faiths

DAY 4. 12th June The Burning bush Ex 3:1-6

Nelson Varcoe Adelaide Congress, South Australia

*There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.
(Exodus 3:2 NIV)*

Basis of Union: Paragraph 4: Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith;

This story of Moses is about an amazing moment when Moses' life is transformed. It goes on to become a transformation of the whole people of Israel. I wrote the following song about that event. God appeared to Moses.

I hope as you reflect on the words of the song it speaks to you too... about us and our nation.

Holy God of the Mountain © Nelson Varcoe 2014

Chorus

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

Give me a Moses' moment, a bush on fire

Give me a Moses' moment, upon the mountain on high

But Lord set me on fire, Yes Lord set me on fire

Chorus

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

Grant us a heavenly healing, over our spirit and our minds

Grant us a heavenly healing, over our country and over our lives.

But Lord set us on fire, Yes Lord set us on fire

Chorus

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

Holy Holy Holy God of the Mountain

- Pray for yourself.
- Pray for your family. Pray for your church. Pray for your nation. Pray for this country.
- Cry out to God for this to become a lived and living experience for each of us... and for our family, our church, nation and our country.
- That the Holy Spirit will bring God's holy fire, that God will appear to us, that Jesus will be Lord.
- That we all will find heavenly healing.

Come Holy Spirit

Come Father God

Come Lord Jesus

Please set us on fire!

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

Pray for the Uniting Church as we continue to respond to the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse in our church schools. Pray for courage and strength to speak the truth in a way that will somehow help survivors. The Uniting Church has asked Commissioner McClellan from the Royal Commission to speak with at the Assembly in Perth, but Terence tells us we're not sure whether that will come off yet. Please pray for healing for those affected not only from abuse within our church but all churches in Australia.

DAY 5. 13th June *Fire by night* Ex 13:17-22; Ex 14:19-25

Barrie Robinson Tasmania

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night (Exodus 13:21 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come.

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

I once worshipped at a church in the Netherlands. “God is vuur” — ‘God is fire’ was the preacher’s topic. Not being very fluent in Dutch, I don’t remember much of what he said, but I think perhaps it related to the passionate nature of God. One is encouraged to consider, what are the characteristics of fire from a human perspective? Warmth, light and companionship around a campfire; heat destruction and fear associated with a bushfire.

As the Children of Israel left Egypt, God provided a column of cloud by day, which became a column of fire by night to guide them. It was light for their path.

Now, however, the Egyptian army thought they had them trapped between themselves and the Sea of Reeds. But God moved the column of fire round behind the Israelites where it became an impenetrable barrier protecting them from the Egyptians.

As we contend in prayer with the forces of evil, they may prove too strong for us, but they are not too strong for our God. He will bring the light and fire of his glory to protect us from forces too strong for us and to lighten our path. So we are enabled to stand firm.

“Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done every thing, to stand firm.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the light of your glory which guides us, for the fire of your glory which protects us. Make us your servants bold as we uphold in prayer your church in this nation. We ask this in Jesus’ name.

Pray for: 1. Unitingworld partner - The Sudan Council of Churches

2. Our incoming President has asked us to pray for a spirit of generosity to become strong in our church. He says “This seems at odds with ever tightening budgets, but I am convinced that God’s ways are not the ways of the world and as the Spirit moves among us growing a spirit of generosity we will be amazed at what God will bring about.”

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DAY 6. 14th June . *Descending in Fire Part One:* Ex 19:16-23

Rev Dr. Alan Russell New South Wales

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently (Exodus 19:18 NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 17: "The Uniting Church acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law."

"Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently."

The Creator, Yaweh, the I am encountered the Israelites through revelations in nature, particularly as fire. Fire is a force created through material and air exploding in a gaseous heat igniting to produce flame and smoke. Fire is both fearful and enticing. We depend on fire in a thousand ways in order to survive but it is also a source of great destruction.

The presence of God on Mount Sinai in fire called for consecration and obedience to the Creator's purposes for the Israelites.' Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain.' Encounter with God requires humility. The revelation of God's righteousness took place as Moses is given the Law by which the people were to live. God's presence as fire witnesses to the gift of life and the judgement of life as expressed in the Law.

God present in Jesus Christ consumes the judgement of life under Law and in mercy and in mercy gifts eternal life to humanity through the finished work of our salvation by Jesus on the Cross and his victory over sin and death. The fire of Jesus Christ our Lord calls us into a life of God's purposing ignited by the Holy Spirit. The fire of the Spirit bearing witness to our spirit that we are God's servant people, each a fire of God's presence in the world.

Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit (descend in fire) like wind and flame resting on us, set our church, our lives alight with the power of your love and goodness as revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. May our love be genuine as we obey your commandment consumed by grace. Amen.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - United Church of Zambia

- the appointment of the new General Secretary (the nominee is Ms Colleen Geyer),

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**DAY 7. 15th June *Descending in Fire Part 2: Ex 19:16-23*
Sitiveni Faupula. ACC Tonga**

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently (Exodus 19:18 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity.

Whenever I hear or see volcanic eruption on the news, I tend to get this uncanny feeling that something extraordinary is taking place. I get a similar kind of feeling when God's redemptive narrative reaches Exodus 19. Where fire and clouds of smoke cover a trembling Mount Sinai we are witnessing something very extraordinary taking place. God for the first time will meet and speak to the entirety of his children; the terms and conditions by which God's family will relate to God and one another will be given; God revealing his glory and majesty to his family.

As the Uniting Church families from all over Australia gather together in the next few weeks to explore and discuss matters that will encourage faithfulness and fruitfulness in the life of the Uniting Church family, we would do well to keep in mind that something extraordinary is taking place right here. God is with us through the Holy Spirit; we hear God's voice through the Scriptures and God's glory and majesty is in the midst of our gathering.

Prayer

Glorious and majestic God, descend in thy Spirit to fill our gathering. Give us ears to hear and wisdom to listen to your guidance and help us to be obedient and humble in thy presence. Amen

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Congregational Christian Church of Niue
b) Our incoming President, Stuart McMillan, for strength, wisdom, and protection by God's grace in the coming months
Northern Synod

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DAY 8: 16th June A Consuming fire –Jumping through the Fiery Doona
Exodus 24:15-17; Deut 5:22-29; Is 33:13
Rev Dean Whittaker Adelaide Congress

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Exodus 24:15-17 New International Version (NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 4: The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work

A story about glory of God revealed in cloud and a consuming fire... We sometimes struggle with the way God chooses to come to us. Not in the manner we expect but in God's own way.

Here's a story..... My daughter Amber went for a visit to a community in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands - Northern South Australia) a few years ago with a church group who were helping run a children's program during the school holidays.

One evening away from the rest of the group, there was a campfire burning and the Anangu kids were full of fun and energy. Amber wandered over. It was a dark but star-filled night. The campfire was burning. The kids were also burning with energy and ideas. Next thing Amber knew some of the boys had lit a doona and a couple of them held it up. While the fire burnt a roundish hole in the doona with feathers flying up and snowing down against a starlit sky a number of the athletic teenagers proceeded to jump through the burning hole until the last boy jumped through as the whole doona totally went up in flames. An impressive spectacle (...and none got hurt). Amber ended up painting this painting in memory of the event.

For me there is some other symbolism. The whole activity is on one hand, crazy and risky. I see the white doona as representing the Church. I see the fire and burning as the Holy Spirit. I see these kids as being like Congress or Aboriginal people - bringing new life and new possibilities that are dangerous and almost unthinkable - like in the Exodus story. Suddenly through the revival that has happened in the Aboriginal church ... through the Holy Spirit's activity enlivening Aboriginal agency the Aboriginal experience of the Holy Spirit burns a hole in the church - the church cannot stay as it was... despite maybe wanting to... despite maybe believing it is being destroyed... I see Congress as bringing a consuming fire to the Uniting Church.

The revival had a number of effects.

- It gave new hope to Aboriginal people about ownership of their own identity and place, their purpose in God's future and left them no longer having to rely on the dominant culture church leadership.
- In doing this it made them free from having to be bound to the Uniting Church because God was doing amazing things in and through them themselves for His kingdom without White people having to be in control. Yet so many stayed with the Uniting Church.
- It also shone a bright light on the racism and a wrong religious spirit in the Uniting Church. Much of the Uniting Church would not take seriously the remarkable new thing God was doing in the church, or would try and say it was an Aboriginal "oddity, an interesting phenomenon, rather than a movement touching the soul of the church."¹
- Even those who did accept some aspects of the revival often were either excited about, or frightened by, the cultural, social and political impacts but refused to really give adequate attention and listen to the significance of prayer and the activity of the Holy Spirit in what was happening.

So I see the revival as being a bit like the boys setting the doona alight and then jumping through it. Many Aboriginal leaders have been willing to take on wider leadership as the church has realized they are willing to jump. But it is a difficult and dangerous activity - so many have been burnt, busted or broken - because while they have been alive to the workings of the Spirit - the Fire - in their cultures, in their communities and in their lives - they have so often found the church wants to bring them into line, teach them how to do things the "right way" - worked towards making them return to being Egyptian slaves of the Uniting Church, rather than God's First people showing the way.

Some of the key Congress leaders have continually and faithfully been Spirit people and have sought to have the broader Uniting Church hear what they are saying about repentance, about being hungry for a touch from God, about letting Jesus really be Lord, and about receiving the Holy Spirit... and after decades of faithfully trying to be heard still feel most of the church is deaf, blind and racist.

Please pray for 2 things

- *That we ourselves are repentant and open to what God is saying, doing and calling us to do - even if it doesn't look like we expect it to be.*
- *Congress leaders and members will be open to the consuming fire of God and not bribed or cowed into being a slave of the Uniting Church or the dominant culture.*

- *That the Uniting Church will respect the Holy Spirit and listen to what God is saying and doing through Congress and its leaders as they listen to God and dare to jump though the fire of the Spirit into God's will.*
- BA Clarke, Aboriginal and Islander Congress, Doc 83-2-C, NTRS781 General Correspondence and Administration Records 1956-1986, Item #19.13, NTA
- Much of what I say here is derived from Jione Havea's (Ed) book: Indigenous Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology: Cross Cultural Engagement, Palgrave Macmillan 2014 Ch 10 National Black Congress: Ambivalence and Ambiguity William W Emilsen William W Emilson

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Congregational Christian Church of Samoa
 b) The Work of Congress. Use Dean's prayer points above.

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DAY 9. 17th June *A Radiant face: Exodus 34:29-35*

Rev (Aunty) Dorothy Gordon Harris. Elder Congress

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord (Exodus 34:29 NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 8: Thus the people of God, through faith and the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, have communion with their Saviour, make their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaim the Lord's death, grow together into Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which Christ will bring to consummation.

When Moses come down from Mt Sinai with two tablets of testimony in his hand he was not aware that his face was radiant , because he has spoken with the Lord God . The skin of his face shone while he talked with him . The glory of God in Moses radiated forth rays of glory

This implies that they had fled from Moses when they saw his Glory.

When Moses had finished speaking with them he put a veil over himself.

Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him he would remove the veil until he came out. The veil speaks to me of a covering or curtain. To me it speaks of total obedience and radical in obedience.

He did not know his face was shining. This symbolizes power and might.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Cook Islands Christian Church
 The Covenanting task group

**DAY 10: . 18th June *Fire and the tabernacle: Numbers 9:15-23; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3*
Annette Blaze , Victoria**

On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. (Numbers 9:15 NIV)

BOU: Par 8The Uniting Church acknowledges that the continuing presence of Christ with his people is signified and sealed by Christ in the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion, constantly repeated in the life of the Church.

God was with the Israelites - visible as a cloud by day and a fire by night. The people obeyed God. But day or night, when the cloud lifted from the tabernacle they broke camp and followed wherever it led. When the cloud remained still, they camped and waited on God. God related to the people through his servant Moses. The tabernacle where God dwelled was a holy place. This Holy God tabernacles with us as we immerse ourselves in his Word and obey his commandments. When God tells us to move or to be still we must obey.

God revealed himself to Martin Luther when he sought God through the Hebrew and Greek scriptures and came to the realisation that it is not about us. It is all about God - God with whom we have a relationship through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. "For in him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28).

In 2 Chronicles 6 we read Solomon's prayer to God. In verse 9 he asks, "But will God really live on earth among people?"(NLT) That was a prophetic statement. Solomon had been blessing God for keeping his promises and asking God to keep another promise to his father David that his descendants would continue to rule over Israel. Solomon, sinner as he was, had a deep relationship with God. After this prayer he called on God to enter the temple, his resting place. Fire flashed down from heaven and burnt up the burnt offerings and sacrifices and the glorious presence of the Lord completely filled the temple. The priests could not enter. When the glory of God came down the people fell face down on the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever!"

We trust our delegates to Assembly to remember that it is not all about them or us. It is about the revelation of God's truth that comes when a community of faith spends time in deep prayer. It is not about convincing arguments or fine rhetoric. God's invincible, overwhelming resurrection power is unleashed when people pray constantly "in one accord". (Acts 1:14). There is nothing more profound than an assembly of people taking the time to pray until the glory of God comes down. God's faithful love endures forever.

Prayer

Lord you are the one in control of your people. Let us be so aware of you that we move when you call, rest when you are still and be forever watchful. Show us ourselves that we may repent of any sin in our life so that our prayers will be the humble, believing prayers of a righteous person in holy fear of the awesomeness of an almighty God. Thank you for the Scriptures, which from beginning to end tell forth your unfathomable love for the world. May the resurrected power of Jesus Christ be our standard in all our decisions! In Jesus name. Annette Blazé

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Evangelical Church of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands
b) the future shape of the UCA's work in remote Australia which have come in a report of a consultation to be held June 3 -5 and the fall out of changes from Frontier Services over the last three years. Pray for guidance, direction and wisdom for the church for this important ministry

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**DAY 11: 19th June Judgement and Fire. Numbers 11:1-3; 16: 1-7; 28-40
Is 66: 15-17; 10:17; Jeremiah 4:2 Rev Anne Hibbard; New South Wales**

And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering the incense (Numbers 16:35 NIV) See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like

whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire Is 66:15

Basis of Union Paragraph 1: To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; Paragraph 15: The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church,

It has been a joy collating this prayer book. I've had the great honour of communicating with many different leaders in the Uniting Church that believe prayer is important. I've been much encouraged as I've received and read their reflections. The depth within them has given me fresh hope for the Uniting Church.

However I have noted one thing. No one freely volunteered for the passages that spoke about fire as God's judgment. I thought at the beginning that I would do one or two that no one else wanted to do. So it is with some hesitation that I share this reflection as most possibly I would not have chosen it either.

Almost everyone in the Uniting Church wants the fire of life that Christ brings. But we are more cautious and reluctant to embrace the fire of the judgment of God. However you cannot have one without the other. God's fire is a holy fire. Some of us can accept that more in our individual lives. We allow the Lord to be refine us in the furnace (see Isaiah 43:10) but we forget that the Lord is about making a holy people for himself not just individuals. The people of Israel's journey through the wilderness was primarily about the Lord transforming them from a grumbling, fragmented faithless people into a people of courage, unity and faith.

Let us go to our passage today. It's all about a power struggle. Most Uniting Church people have gone through the distress of church conflict at one time or another. Most often it is about a leadership struggle, including when some leaders try to overreach the authority that the church and God have given them. Or even in some circumstances people have taken authority on themselves that no one has given them. How we deal with conflict in the church is vital.

In the book of Numbers, Moses is a leader that lets God be the sole living Head of the community. Could it be that the true issue about leadership in Numbers 16 is that people like Korah, Dathan, Abiram and the 250 community leaders' primary struggle for power was with God himself. Korah was from the tribe of Levi and had a ministry (v9-10) in the tabernacle. He was not a priest however and wanted more. He thought everyone was as holy as everyone else and that Moses was going too far in setting up the Aaronic priesthood. He had stirred up rebellion and encouraged others who were from the tribe of Reuben called Dathan and Abiram to join him. He also had on his side 250 men who were well known lay leaders in the community.

What Korah and his friends didn't accept was that the way things were in the set up of leadership for Israel including the priesthood wasn't Moses' idea at all but God's. I'm not sure if they truly believed in the true living God even after all they had seen so far. They had a concept of a God they could manipulate into anything they wanted. Even though they had seen the fire of the pillar of smoke by night and the smoke filling the tabernacle, even though they had seen the fire come down on Mount Sinai, they rebelled. They wanted to be in control, not Moses, not Aaron, and especially not God.

So the Lord's judgment came upon Korah, Dathan, Abiram. The earth swallowed them up v 31-34. And fire came and consumed the 250 community leaders who were offering incense.

How do we react when we hear this? The people of Israel reacted with more grumbling. Can we be honest and ask if that is not going on in our hearts too. Because of the increase in opposition to Moses and Aaron the Lord's wrath brought a plague against the people of Israel. Moses v 47

tells Aaron to hurry and make atonement for them by offering incense. The Lord accepted Aaron's offering and the plague stopped. The Lord showed by budding Aaron's staff (Numbers 17), that Aaron was his chosen one to enter the most Holy and Holies and offer sacrifice for the people.

Recently I had the great privilege of spending several hours listening to a first nation elder, national leader and the elder of Congress that signed the covenant – Uncle Bill Hollingsworth. I asked him what it was we could do for Congress and first nation people . I will never forget his answer. He said “ Pray for the will of God to be done”. He also spoke much about how now that Christ has come we have not the Aaronic priesthood but the priesthood of Melchizidek. We have one High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. At one time God chose Aaron and his family to make sacrifices for atonement that had to be made over and over again. But now in Christ, God has chosen one High Priest alone who has made a sacrifice of himself once for all time.

The challenge for us in the Uniting Church is that we have so many different groups trying to assert their influence or one could say “grab for power”. However in the Basis of Union paragraph one, it explains that this Uniting Church we belong to has only one sole loyalty. This sole loyalty is “to Christ the living Head of the Church.” The fire of God's judgment is not only in the old Testament but also in the new. Are we willing to say Come, Lord Assess and deal with us through the changes of history through the news of your completed work. Are we willing together to stand up against anything that stops the Lord Jesus Christ from leading in our church? Are we willing to let the fire of Christ burn away the dross and for the eternal gold and silver within the Uniting Church to become purified. The fire of God's purifying flame is not a curse. It is a gift of life so that we can transform to become all that the Lord is calling us to be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ our Lord and for the wonder and mystery he has won upon the cross for us. We thank Please that He is the living Head of the church. Forgive us when we have allowed other people or things to dominate. Purify us that we would be ready once again in the Uniting Church to go forward together with our sole loyalty to Christ, the Living Head of the Church. In Jesus' mighty name we pray.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
Uniting Justice Australia

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DAY 12. 20th June Humility and fire (part one) : Psalm 18: 25-28
Rev Ron Brookman New South Wales

You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light (Ps 18:27-28 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love. Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain.

Alexis came to our healing service, terrified of dying. Diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour she shared a room in the oncology ward with Julie, from our church. Julie invited her to the healing service to find hope, and hopefully, Jesus. Alexis sought leave from the hospital to come. Sometimes both ladies came together, each wearing their head scarves. Julie's face beamed with faith, hope and love. Alexis' face was heavy with worry and fear.

As we prayed for the sick, and anointed each with oil, a team member would share a brief word from the Scripture to inspire faith and hope. Over months the ladies came and went from oncology, but eagerly sought to come to the solace found at the healing service. Alexis came to believe in Jesus, and to place her trust in Him. The weight of her countenance lifted, and she, too, would come, able to join in worship, to lift her hands with what strength she had, and to know that she was held in His hands.

The cancer beat her. 6 months on, she passed on. But she had beaten the cancer. Her husband came to our healing service 4 weeks later to thank us and to play a recording that Alexis had made for her family and friends in the week that she passed onto Glory. She testified that having found Jesus she had also found peace and freedom from fear. All anxiety had passed, and though she would miss seeing her children married, and the grand children they would give life to, she knew that she had greater life, and would see it all from Heaven. Worry and fear had been eclipsed by faith and peace.

The Lord places fire in our lives' engine. His light keeps our lamps burning. Our God turns the darkness of our fears and pain into the light of His love, His hope, His peace.

Pride stubbornly clings to the world and its values. It demands life according to the materialistic, have-it-now, must control, appetites of our 5 senses. Humility surrenders to God, and trusts that His eternal love and light releases LIFE to our souls. This life treasures His promises and Covenant, casting light upon what is truly of worth, revealing the sham of the world's vain glory. His love holds our hearts secure.

6 months later Julie also passed into the fullness that her faith had believed for, holding her Cross in her left hand, her right hand open, facing upwards, awaiting the hand of Jesus to come to lift her. Doubtless she heard the words, *'Well done, good and faithful servant'*, as He did so.

***Eternal God of love, grace and beauty,
Thank You that You have opened my eyes to behold Your light,
that You have placed Your flame of love and life within my soul,
that You keep my lamp burning, and turn my darkness into light.
Come to us, as a church, particularly as the Assembly meets next month.
Cause Your living flame to be at the heart of each meeting, and in the fellowship between all
members. Guide and lead, casting Your light on every session, that the lamp of the Uniting
Church may burn bright in our world. In Jesus' Name, Amen*** Rev Ron Brookman

Pray for: a) partner - Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma b) UnitingCare Australia

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DAY 13: 21st June Humility in Fire Part Two Psalm 18: 25-28

Sitiveni Faupula. ACC Tonga

You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light (Ps 18:27-28 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 1: To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word; and they seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this union these Churches commit their members to acknowledge one another in love and joy as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, to hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, and daily to seek to obey his will.

In the context of God's covenant with Israel, David can confidently declare that he is faithful and blameless before God. To such a person God promised they would enjoy his faithfulness and blamelessness. (v.25)

David is here claiming that promise and shows that it applies to all people. Even though he is a king, he includes himself among the humble and the poor who surrender their life into God's hands. The beauty of God's promise to David, the humble and the poor is that God will continue to show his faithfulness and blamelessness, in that it is the Lord who will keep the lamp burning and turn people's darkness into light. Perhaps the Psalm was pointing to the true light of the world who gives eternal life to all who has faith in him.

Prayer

Gracious and loving Father, through your Son we draw near with praise and thanksgiving. Praise be your name who saves the humble and continue to uphold the poor. Praise be your name for keeping the promise of your salvation. In your promise to be faithful and blameless toward us, may we also live faithful and blameless lives. Amen

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Methodist Church of Samoa
B) Multicultural and cross-cultural ministry

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DAY 14. 22nd June An Answer in fire: 1 Kings 18:30-39 Rev Stephen Larkin, Nedlands Uniting Church, Western Australia.

Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:37-38a NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 15: The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight.

The situation was dire in Israel. There was a drought. There had been no rain for over 3 years. The whole country was suffering. Crops were withering, people were starving and dying. And out of this dryness emerges the prophet Elijah to challenge Ahab, king of Israel.

"Let's have it out", challenges Elijah, "Your Ba'al versus my God. Winner takes all." So they prepare a sacrifice of a bull each and lay it on an altar of wood. Elijah then lays out the challenge." Pray for your God to consume your sacrifice without you setting fire to the wood." Nothing happens. Elijah, 'encourages', Elijah pokes fun. Nothing.

Elijah then orders water to soak his sacrifice. Water- the most precious commodity in the land. Four jars of water, then another four, and then another four.

In the midst of a drought, their most precious commodity, water, is wasted. But Elijah knew the drought was a symptom, not the solution. And so Elijah prays, not for rain, not even for fire, but that people's hearts will be turned back to the true God. Elijah prayed and the fire fell and consumed the sacrifice, the wood and the water.

As I write this, Pentecost is in a few days' time where we celebrate the fire of God coming on those frightened and powerless disciples, fire that ignited their hearts and tongues to proclaim the praise of God, to call people to the true God, and to become a community that changed the world.

Fire is a symbol of power and empowerment and of cleansing.

These fires were not just game changers, but world changers. Thirsty and struggling men and women saw life completely differently through the action of the fire of God in their midst. They saw the refining power of God at work in their midst.

Too often we pray thinking we know the answer, we pray for what seems obvious, the water, the breaking of the drought, when we need to simply pray Elijah's simple prayer- "Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Prayer *Gracious God, we ask that we and all the members of Assembly would have their hearts turned towards you. Too often our prayer presumes we know what your will should be. Give us ears that not just hear, but listen and obey, to the whispers of your Spirit. Empower us with the fire of your Spirit to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with You, our God. In Jesus mighty name, Amen.*

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Nauru Congregational Church
b) Synod of Western Australia . Ministry of PNEUMA in Western Australia

DAY 15. 23rd June Chariots of fire (2 Kings 2:9-13 ; 2 Kings 6:15-17
Ps. Sital Sanjivi Hindi Pastor, Liverpool Uniting, New South Wales

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. (2 Kings 2:11 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 15: The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church,

The ministry of Elijah is one surrounded by the supernatural as revealed in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. And as we arrive at these passages of scripture, we arrive at the great climax of Elijah's ministry to this point. I say to this point, for although we may think Elijah was taken up into heaven, this may not be so. For one, the chronology of 2 Chronicles 21:12-15 reveals Elijah was simply translated from one location to another, and therefore warned by letter king Jehoram, king of Judah. And secondly, the Bible is very clear that no one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man" (John 3:13; cf. Acts 1:1-9). Upon reading these passages, it would be so easy to be drawn into the wonder such a phenomena of chariots and horses of fire ascending with someone from the face of the earth to the heights of the skies above and out of sight. There may be much that one could draw from this passage, yet less we get so caught up in the spectacular one may miss the fact that there are significant spiritual truths that are being communicated. And of the many things that may be said, one thing appears apparent to me, and that is that the Lord was preparing Elisha for that which he first sent Elijah.

a) **The Lord taught Elisha that the He should be the prime object of his affection and attention, not Elijah.** Only the Lord knows what must have been going through Elisha's heart as he realized that this man of God who loved him as a father would now be taken from him. What agony of heart, love and loyalty that repeatedly he said, 'As surely as the Lord lives and as I live, I shall not live you' (2 Kings 2:1-12). It is natural that one should become so connected to another, but it may also well become one's undoing. For in looking at Elijah for everything, Elisha had overlooked the One who Elijah saw as everything. We may be so often captured by the influence of the greatness of those who are godly, and yet forsake the One who is greater than all, and without whom no one can become great in godliness. This same God who took Elijah up, asked of His disciple, 'Do you love me more than these?' (John 21:15; cf. Luke 14:26).

In the weakness of our flesh and cares of this world should not our prayer and desire be that of an echo of Elisha's, 'I will not leave you.'

b) **The Lord taught Elisha that far above all powers He was supreme.** A man may display his great might in battle, a king display the size and power of his army. Who, but God could bring down fire from heaven to consume (2 Kings 1:10)? Who but God could answer the call of His servant Elijah with such blazing fire that sacrifice, wood, stones, soil and even the water be gone, bringing the hardest of hearts to the ground in prostration? (1 Kings 18:38-39). Elisha from his calling (1 Kings 19:19ff) and becoming intimately involved in the life and ministry of Elijah, saw the man and power he possessed. Yet, it is Lord who empowered Elijah, for no man could do what he did unless the Lord was with him. Ministry does not start with man, but with God in the secret place of prayer (Mark 1:35), for it is here that one is in the presence of the Almighty, and it is from this essential core that God works wonders that remind us to, Seek the Lord and His strength; seek his presence continually! (1 Chron. 16:11, cf. 2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 4:13). 'For He is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the age to come' (Eph.1:19-21).

c) **The Lord taught Elisha's servant that His powerful presence was with them.** So many are those who trust in chariots and horses (Ps. 20:7), but a believer and minister of the Lord must trust in the Commander of the armies of heaven (Joshua 5:15-17) whose chariots and horses are those of blazing fire, and which number ' . . . tens of thousands and thousands of thousands. .' This is the God in whose presence we live and serve. Could this recurring appearance of fire from heaven been to communicate that a reminder that His power and presence with those who were with Him, both now as it had been before (Ex. 13:21) and as it would continue to be with those who walked with Him. Could such truth have not been the reason why David said, 'Though an army besiege me, my heart shall not fear . . . (Ps. 27:3a). Indeed, it must have been a frightening thing to see the vast army that Elisha's servant saw. 'But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed . . .' (Heb. 10:39), but those, 'Who walk by faith, and not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:7) otherwise we could never go forward for God. For know and are assured of this, His presence is always with us (Duet. 31:6; Is. 43:1-2; John 16:33)

The miracles of God are never without meaning, for where there is a miracle there is a message. As for Elisha who witnessed these things, so for us, who by faith have believed in the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of our Lord, let Him be the prime object of our love and loyalty, the supreme source of our power and authority and in His powerful presence daily live.

Prayer

Father teach us to honour and obey our elders, those who have journeyed the Christian life before us and whom you have given to lead us. And for them we thank you, the Father of lights from whom all good things come. But above all, may we never place anyone above you in our honour, loyalty and love.

Remind us that even in our weakness and helplessness, you are our strength and our ever present help. May the words of your mouth, from which you created the heavens and the earth and all that live and exist, give us the hope we so desperately need in a hopeless world, that we may know that greater is our God than our failures and fears. Help us dear Father to remember and never forget that as though overcome by adversity on all sides, as dark and lonely as this life may seem, we will never walk alone for your rod and your staff they comfort us and you, the Good Shepherd of our

faith will never leave us nor forsake us. That we may be still and know that you are God, the One who when this journey we call life is over, we will see face to face in glory.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu
Formation, education and discipleship

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DAY 16. 24th June : His Word like fire : Jer 20:7-12: Rev Dr Robert Brennan

But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 1: they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people. To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word;

"It'll all end in tears!" was one of those sayings that Gran used to say. She usually referred to some shortsighted and usually dangerous act of youthful bravado or to indiscreet lovers. It is also a saying that could be considered Jeremiah's motto. "It will all end in tears." Jeremiah certainly was not the most popular person of his time and the cynicism and bitterness generated by his rejection certainly taint his emotions and words in this passage.

He called God's people back to walking with God, at a time when they were absolutely sure that they were doing the best they could do in their rapidly changing society with its fluctuating economics and unstable politics. His people were sure that they could together discern the best and wisest way forward. They were sure by all the best wisdom of their culture that they could reimagine their world. They were sure they were right and this simple prophet was wrong. But, they were wrong. All too late, Jeremiah the despised prophet was remembered because the people experienced the consequences of their actions ending in tears.

The people and their leaders said, "We know what is right. We are wise. We know wise people." They acted on what they knew as best they could. If we examine the circumstances and the rapidly narrowing political options of the times, we would have to say that we too would be tempted to rely on what we know of the best wisdom and what we have learnt about God's desire for justice and love. But that is precisely the problem, that is we come to rely on what we know and have learnt rather than on who we are supposed to walk with. We come to rely on ourselves rather than on God. As God's people we are to walk with God rather than rely on what we know about God. It is a living relationship.

Jeremiah's call to let go of everything material and walk close to God in obedience, made no sense to his contemporaries, confused and angered them. Nevertheless, events eventually proved him right. We live in a world where the best wisdom of the world and even of the church isolates the simple preachers call to repentance and joyful obedience. "It is not sophisticated enough to deal with the changes of contemporary society!" In doing this we move to depend on what we know rather than on the person we are meant to know. Maybe the answer is not that we in some Neitzschean "will to power" continue to try to shape our reality but to simply let the God whom we serve shape us as we listen, as we change our thinking at God's prompting and obey God's command and call on us. May we not wait a generation or three to discover that we should have listened to Jeremiah as his people did.

Prayer: *Lord help us to hear your voice, to learn afresh to your voice in spite of our circumstances and to obey you. Let us hear the voice of Jeremiah among us, the voice simply calling us to follow and obey you, the voice that will not be stilled because it burns to the bones. May we too share in*

that call and remind each other to trust not in our own understanding but in the person of you our Lord and Saviour. Rev Rob

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - The Kiribati Protestant Church
b) Synod of Queensland c) Uniting Faith and Discipleship

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DAY 17. 25th June A new heart Ezekiel 1:4-13; Ezekiel 7:16-22. Sepi Haumono

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.... Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. (Ezekiel 11:19,22 NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 3: To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.

A NEW HEART

Though the pious captives in Babylon were insulted by the Jews who continued in Jerusalem, but as always God remains Faithful to His chosen people. We see in this reading how gracious and loving our God is, that even when we are unfaithful to Gods commands and his ways- He still remains faithful to love us and give us His promises that many times we don't even feel we deserve. His promise for the Israelites was that He would restore them and bring them back to their land and would perform a beautiful exchange in the process

1. He promised he would give them "AN UNDIVIDED HEART" so that their hearts would be fixed on God alone and unwavered.

2. A "New spirit"- A new spirit that is ready and willing to do Gods will. A spirit that is sensitive and discerns correctly the leadership of the Holy Spirit and doesn't look back but moves forward with just like the cherubim's, they never looked back.

3. Remove a heart of stone for a "heart of flesh"

A carnal heart that is self willed becomes hardened to Gods commands because it's fixed to human command. But God promises that He will strip them of their hardened hearts and give them "A NEW HEART OF FLESH" soft and pure, receptive to the promptings of God. Matthew 5:8 blessed are those who are pure in heart for they we see God.

I'm sure we can all relate to this reading. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We must then confess and truly repent of our sins, hardness of our hearts, our rebellion towards God and his commands and the bible says-when we do this, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. When we humble ourselves before God and acknowledge His Grace, His Spirit is upon us and above us to give us new life, new direction, new insight to the things of God, protection, provision and all that we need to fulfil the purpose of which he called us.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians [5:17](#) NIV)

Prayer: *Abba Father in the mighty name of Jesus Christ we thank you for your Word that continues to teach, mould, rebuke and instruct us in this life. We are truly sorry for the many times that we have rebelled against your word and have chosen to follow our carnal hearts and minds. Lord we ask this day that you would bless us with a new heart that is undivided and fixed on you and a new spirit that is receptive to the leading of Your Holy Spirit so that all the planning's and decisions that are made during the Assembly of the*

Uniting Church in 2015 will be your will and not ours. For apart from Christ we can do nothing. Your will be done through Christ we pray. Amen

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

Youth and Young adults in the Uniting Church would arise with the fire of Christ.

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DAY 18. 26th June God with us in fire Daniel 3:16-29 : Isaiah 43:1-2 Bella Hibbard, New South Wales

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods (Daniel 3:25 NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 11: The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.

The young men stood before the king with the eyes of the crowd upon them. On one side, the grotesque statue towered over them. On the other side, a blazing furnace was being fed. They looked directly at the king, who awaited the answer to his question. With confidence that transcended the danger of the situation, they refused to bow down to the statue and affirmed once again their sole allegiance to the Lord. After their words had been spoken, the furnace was heated seven times hotter than it had been. Even as they stood, they could feel the heat of the flames warming their bodies.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were confronted with a challenge to their faith. They were expected to bow down in worship to an idol, with the threat of execution if they did not. Still, the three young men remained steadfast in their faith and refused to compromise. They knew that God was powerful enough to save them but, living through the exile, they would have seen the reality of suffering for God's people. They counted the possibility that God might not deliver them in this instance. The certainty of rescue, then, wasn't the basis of them standing up to the king; that came from a determination to remain faithful and obedient to God, even if it cost them their lives.

Some have suggested that Daniel 3 is merely a midrash, a sermon illustration of sorts, of Isaiah 43:1-2. I believe, however, that it is a historical account of something that really happened. Still, the words of Isaiah may have been in their minds as the young men were led to the furnace. In Isaiah, God promises to be with his people as they pass through the waters; that when they walk through the fire, they will not be burned. This doesn't promise we'll be spared the waters or the fire, but promises protection through them. The three young men were thrown into the furnace but it was there in the midst of the fire that they were joined by another, one who looked like 'a son of the gods'. It is as we stand for God, even in the midst of our trials and difficulties, that God promises to be with us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to stand steadfast through times of discouragement, opposition, even persecution. Strengthen us to not compromise like Shadrach, Meshach and Abnedgo. Thank you as we stand for you in the midst of our trials and difficulties, you promise to be with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - The United Church in Solomon Islands

b) Assembly historical reference committee

DAY 19. 27th June Repentance, Saved from fire : Joel 2:3-5; 12-17; 28-32
Pastor Andy Collins , Newtown Mission

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning... I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke.. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; (Joel 2:30-32 NIV)

Basis of Union, Paragraph 3: In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith.

One of my roles at Newtown Mission is Household Pastor. We are blessed to have eight households here. Over the years, we have had to paint and repaint these properties. I've learnt something about what constitutes a bad paintjob: when the painters cut corners, we usually end up having people complain that the paint is peeling off the walls again. It's costly, inconvenient and unnecessary if the job is done right the first time. Usually there are two common problems... Firstly, instead of scraping all the old paint off the walls and ceilings, the painters simply remove the obviously flaky bits, and then simply paint over the top. It looks great for a little while, sometimes even years. But soon enough, the paint starts flaking again because all the old, dry paint buried underneath that wasn't removed starts to come away from the wall.

Secondly, quite often the walls or ceilings develop holes as the material that makes them starts breaking down, or get wet. They often contain lots of dust. The way that you deal with this is also hard work. You have to remove all the rot before you try and repaint. If you don't, then it won't be long before the rot once again shows. In fact, even if you try and paint over the rot, it still shows if you look hard enough.

Interestingly, as I reflect on the history of Israel, I see similarities. Instead of humbly coming to God with repentant hearts, stripped of all pride, they do one of two things. They continue to go through the motions: they sing the songs, read the Scriptures, offer their sacrifices, but it's all dry underneath. They are walking in disobedience and this detached sort of worship life never pleases God. Nothing short of their broken, humble, contrite hearts will please God. Then their worship will be pleasing!

Or they have simply let bad stuff in, and everything has started rotting. Idol worship, false doctrines, and worldly ideas that actually eat away at the blessed community God wanted to establish if they had obediently followed His commands and trusted Him at His word. Their survival depends on nothing short of removing these foul practices and beliefs.

How little things have changed for the Church in the last 2000 years! We too can be just as guilty of simply going through the motions, and our worship life becomes dry. Or we allow worldly ideas and anti-Christian influences in that stop the blessings of God flowing.

Into the dry and corrupted worship life of Israel, as into our own, God speaks... Come back to Me, your first Love. In humility, allow your hearts to break for your lukewarmness and disobedience. In response, God says, blessings will flow from His very throneroom. Such is the impact of our repentance on God, that He is moved to transform Creation itself as a result.

When it comes to removing old paint from a car, scraping takes far too long. What's needed is a scorching flame, then that old paint just burns away! Similarly, when we come to God with

humble, repentant hearts, He provides the fire that removes the dryness and the rot. It's a messy, risky process, but the result? *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

May we have the humility and courage to individually and corporately search ourselves for any dryness or rot, and allow the Lord's fire to consume these things. May we be stripped back to unique communities that allow His blessings to flow afresh. May He once again show wonders in the heavens and on the Earth!

Prayer: *Father God, too often we get so side-tracked! Rather than keeping our faith and worship fresh, it gets dry and we go through the motions. And rather than taking You at Your word, and finding our peace in You alone, we seek to find answers and comfort in the world around us. We pray for the courage and humility to return to You, our First Love, with the promise and expectancy that You long to perform still more signs and wonders through Your church that will resonate through the heavens and the earth. In Jesus' powerful name we pray! AMEN.*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - United Church in Papua New Guinea
Admission of Ministers committee

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DAY 20. 28th June Wall of fire : Zechariah 2:5; Isaiah 60:1-2 Barrie Robinson, Tasmania

'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'
(Zechariah 2:4-5 NIV)

*Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. (Isaiah 60:1-2)*

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Anyone who goes camping knows that a campfire provides warmth and gives an atmosphere of companionship. In countries where there are dangerous wild animals, it also keeps these away and affords protection. Even in Australia, it keeps away mosquitos and other unpleasant insects!

God had chosen Jerusalem as a place to bear his name, and at the dedication of his temple in Solomon's day, his *shekinah* glory came upon it so that no-one could enter.

In this third vision, Zechariah sees a wall of fire around the city, to protect it. It had no walls, but God's glory was within it. The Jerusalem of the vision was, of course, a city whose inhabitants were faithful to God's covenant and kept his commandments in love. But the reality was otherwise. Most of the time, the people were unfaithful, and this led to the city being destroyed by fire in 587 BCE and again in 70 CE.

Just as Jerusalem was God's sanctuary, so God intends our bodies, our hearts, to be his sanctuary — the temple of the Holy Spirit. If I am faithful in love to God and keep right relationship with him, I can expect his *shekinah* glory to shine forth from me. So also it is with our churches, the worshipping body, that is, not the building.

So long as we are in right relationship with God, he will shine his glory through us both individually and collectively. He will also surround us with his protecting fire, not from earthly danger and mishaps, but from the forces of spiritual wickedness that would distract us from the path that God has set before us.

Prayer

Almighty Father, as a disciple of the crucified, risen and glorified Christ, by your grace restore me, equip me and sanctify me that I may reflect your glory into the world around me, Through Jesus Christ my Lord.

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Christian Church in Sumba
b) Synod of Victoria - Tasmania

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DAY 21. 29th June In the beginning , John 1:1-5; John 3:16-21
Rev Prof James Haire AC Past President of the Uniting Church

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (Jn 1:1, 4-5NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3. The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity.

Creation began with the light coming out of the darkness. In the Gospel according to John, Jesus comes as the fulfilment of that light which came at the beginning. Jesus is the true light, which lightens up every person who comes into the light. The darkness is always there, but, as the Gospel according to John tells us, the darkness is never able to overcome the light. The Greek word which we translate as “overcome” actually means two things: one “overcome” or “put out”, and two “understand”. So the darkness of the world never totally understands the presence of Christ the Light. So also the darkness of the world is never able completely to overcome Christ the Light and put him out.

The truth is that Christ the Light will always be at the centre of our world, whether we like it or not, and whether we follow him or not. This is the truth, and the good news from God about this world. It was arranged by God in this way from the beginning.

So, when we gather together as followers of Christ this Light, all we are asked to do is in all kinds of ways to praise the wonder of the Light entering our world, and to realise that this Christ the Light will never be put down or put out. What we have to do is quite straightforward and quite limited. We simply are called by Christ the Light of this dark world to praise him, to love him, to follow him in all that we do, and never to be afraid of what the darkness of the world might do to us. This Christ the Light will be there for us forever. In particular, we are never to let the darkness of the world set our personal agenda, or the agenda of the gathered Christian community, the church in assembly, by making us feel that we need to follow that dark agenda or are somehow inadequate if we do not follow that dark agenda.

Rather, the very centre of our personal and church life is to be Christ the Light, the true Light of the world.

Prayer:

Almighty and Loving God, in Jesus Christ you have given us light for the world, the fulfilment of the light which first came at creation. The darkness of our world will never overcome or put out that light in Jesus, even though that darkness often does not understand him. Keep us in that Light. Let that Light, and not any darkness of this world, be our sole agenda as we gather in this Assembly of the people of the Light.

James Haire

Pray for: a) Unitingworld partner - Evangelical Christian Church in Halmahera
b) Church polity reference committee

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**DAY 22. 30th June Baptized with fire Luke 3:15-17, Rev Dr Dean Drayton
Past President of the Uniting Church**

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 7:.. "Baptism into Christ's body initiates people into Christ's life and mission in the world, so they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit."

"As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'"

There are powerful historical memories here that John is including in his declaration. The temple in Jerusalem was built on a threshing floor on Mt Zion. While the Israelites waited for Moses there was a consuming fire on the top of Mt Sinia, and later in the wilderness fire came upon the sons of Aaron who offered unholy fire and consumed them. John is not only pointing beyond himself to the Messiah who will come to the temple, he is indicating the Holy Spirit will be a purifying fire upon those who are baptized.

'Hearts on fire' can be hearts burning with passion and conviction, but 'hearts on fire' can also be hearts suffering the burning of the chaff in their life that the grain may find its place in the presence of God's granary. Both are involved with the reality of baptism.

The Basis of Union states. "Baptism into Christ's body initiates people into Christ's life and mission in the world, so they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit." (Par 7 Baptism)

Christ's body, the new temple of the Holy Spirit, brings us into 'one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth'. How we need the Holy Spirit to fire us with this vision of the future of the planet, while removing from us the chaff that gets in the way of this heavenly purpose. Whatever else is happening here, Christ's people know this fire is not under their control. They are initiated into Christ's life and mission in the world. Burn both ways in us Holy Spirit, with moments of ecstasy and joy, as well as pruning and suffering.

Prayer

We praise you God that you have let loose among us the awesome presence of your encouraging and disturbing Holy Spirit. Thankyou that you give us new eyes and new ears to both see and receive what you have for us as a Uniting Church, one church among so many others. Open our eyes to our sisters and brothers, to see and celebrate with those who are bathed in the joy of your heavenly vision, and to support and encourage those who are seeing both the truth and the dross and irrelevance in what they do. Help us to reaffirm our baptism with your living fire. Push us toward the deepest love and joy as well as push us to the purity of service and suffering. Amen.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa
Formation of Education for ministry work

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**DAY 23. 1st July Flickering flames: Matthew 12:18-21 Jill Tabart.
Past President of the Uniting Church**

Matthew 12:18-21 (GNT)

*¹⁸ "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
the one I love, and with whom I am pleased.
I will send my Spirit upon him,
and he will announce my judgment to the nations.
¹⁹ He will not argue or shout,
or make loud speeches in the streets.
²⁰ He will not break off a bent reed,
nor put out a flickering lamp.
He will persist until he causes justice to triumph,
²¹ and on him all peoples will put their hope."*

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love.

Flicker: to shine with a light that is sometimes bright and sometimes weak
Smoulder: to burn slowly with smoke but without flames

I remember camp-fire times with my Dad.

I remember his painstaking efforts to demonstrate the ancient ones' fire-making technique of friction between 2 sticks, aided by seemingly futile face-reddening blowing.

I remember my wide-eyed wonder when wisps of smoke started to waft up from where the sticks were in contact; definite disbelief when a tiny glow was possibly glimpsed; then [*'O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'*] absolute amazement when a flame burst forth, to be nurtured into a fully-fledged fire by us kids with dry leaves and twigs.

From apparently barren resources, the improbable CAN be encouraged to emerge.

Matthew quotes this passage [12:18-21] from the book of the prophet Isaiah [42:1-4] to show the fledgling Christian community of his time that Jesus fulfils the hopes for a coming Messiah, the suffering servant (not the triumphant warrior) who will usher in the kingdom of God - for all people.

But in the time of the Hebrew people in exile in Babylon, this passage from 'Second Isaiah' brought glimpses of hope to the hearts of a despairing people who felt God had deserted them. The passage can be read from these displaced people's perspective as describing a person, the

one suffering servant, OR as a clarion call to the exiled nation to live out faithfully its understanding of God's purposes, even in this foreign land amongst a society with diverse faiths and practices.

There's the image of a battered, bruised and bent reed, useless for commercial purposes like weaving, yet valued for its potential and supported till it can regain its strength; there's the image of a flickering or smouldering candle all but snuffed out, being gently coaxed into life again – familiar images from daily life that would have powerfully reminded this community that their God is a powerful God, and that God's kingdom of justice and peace for everyone can be achieved by even the weakest being helped to take their part, even in the most unlikely situations.

What does this passage say to us, the Uniting Church in Australia, in 21st century Australian society?

- Where around you in church or society are the battered, bruised and bent reeds needing support?
- How can you show the de-valued, the despondent, that they are precious with potential?
- Where in church or society is the flickering, smouldering candle all but snuffed out?
- What does it take to allow God to trim the spent wick, to apply the friction necessary to re-kindle a strong flame once more – even using the most improbable resources?

Hearts on fire -?

*'Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.'* [Proverbs 4:23]

Prayer

Your fire, Lord, that's burning deep down in our heart is oft times now flickering – will it go out?!

When challenges, qualms or catastrophes loom, our faith takes a battering, we're sinking in gloom.

The wick's black and brittle, perhaps nearly spent; give ear to our heartache, Lord: hear our lament!

Please trim back the used wick and wipe out our shame; nurture potential, Lord: cosset the flame.

Shelter from fierce storms, protect from the gale - show us again that your love will prevail.

Give us the vision to follow your way - till God's love and justice bring hope for each day.

Amen

Jill Tabart
April 2015

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua
Defence Force Chaplaincy

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24. 2nd July *Salted with fire*: Mark 9:44-50 Rev Dean Whittaker and Pastor Lloyd Hollingsworth

Mark 9:49-50

'For everyone will be salted with fire.'^[a] ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it?^[b] Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another (Mark 9:49 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 4: he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

I have spent some time thinking about Mark's quotation of Jesus, "For everyone will be salted with fire." It is not a Bible reading that I've really looked at before. It seems to be a pretty consistent translation looking at various versions, although some of the later ancient versions of Mark added or substituted "*and every sacrifice will be salted with salt*".

It is a quite enigmatic sentence... it may have been an old proverb in Jesus' day – well known and well understood. The use of salt for preservation or for offering up with sacrifices may have been obvious back then. But not for me, or most of us, today.

I can imagine a giant saltshaker shaking out flames, although I doubt that Jesus used salt shakers like we do today.

One of my colleagues said that image makes him think of the story of Pentecost and the flames landing on each person's head.

Anyway, for some reason, I feel like sharing something my colleague Pastor Lloyd Hollingsworth shared with us earlier this year to help us in our praying this morning...

Pastor Lloyd Hollingsworth dream

I had a dream this morning. I had the dream and I woke up, and I asked the Lord for the interpretation. He gave me the interpretation and I drifted back into sleep again and the dream continued. It's highly unusual for me. So when it happens I know that it comes from the Spirit of the Lord and it's relevant for here now.

Father I ask you in Jesus' name, as I share the dream you would download into their Spirit what the interpretation means and impact them by the dream.

This is the dream

I was in the full gospel church in Cairns. I wanted to enter the building. It was in the semi-darkness, approaching the doorway. Two teenagers were sitting on the church steps. Across the doorway was a large purple curtain. The curtain was blocking my way into the building. People were inside. I went right on up to the curtain through the teenagers. I pulled the curtain right up to my face to my eyes, to peer inside through the purple curtain, to see what was happening inside. As I looked through the curtain material I clearly saw my dad at the front of the church ministering on the pulpit. He is the pastor of our full gospel church in Cairns. He is 87 years old. He represents the old guard. He represents the old wine skin. That is the interpretation the Spirit of the Lord gave me when I woke up.

I woke up. Lord Jesus please give me the interpretation of the dream.

Its interpretation came. The two teenagers sitting on the church steps represent the younger generation trying to get into the church. But it's blocked. Their entry into the church is blocked by that curtain. What does purple represent? There was a royal coloured curtain there. The teenagers wanted to come through but they couldn't. They cannot enter because of the curtain blocking their entry across the doorway. I asked the Lord what does that curtain represent. Clear as a bell He gave it to me. It represents fanatical religiosity. Fanatical religiosity is stopping the entry of the new wine skins. Fanatical religiosity is a devil. It is more than that, it is a principality. It can be compared to the Prince of Persia. That is how powerful this religious spirit is over the church in this land and over the church around the world. Fanatical religiosity is that curtain that is stopping the entry of our young people, our

youth. And that is why the church is dying because there is no youth. No reproduction is taking place in the church because of the old order .

When we get old we can't reproduce, husbands and wives in the natural. God intervened for Sarah and Abraham in their old age to give them their capacity to have their son. That's why Sarah laughed. There is no reproduction taking place in the church because of the deadness of religion preventing new birth taking place in the church.

I fell back into sleep again. The dream continued. I was back in the church again. It seemed to be semi-darkness again inside the church. I was dressed in pyjamas in the church. The semi-darkness represents the spirit of fanatical religiosity. The pyjamas represent the fact that the church is sleeping. We sleep in our pyjamas don't we?

My dad the pastor was there in the church and in the front row. I could hear a shuffling noise but because it was dark I couldn't see what was going on. There seemed to be other people present. A table was spread at the front of the meeting. I sat down at the table. A meal was brought to me. I ate. As the meal was being brought to me it spilled onto the floor. I was so hungry that I ate but the meal had been spilled over onto the table by the person bringing it to me... it was falling off of the plate and onto the floor. Teenagers were present in the meeting. I asked them to clean up the spilled food. They refused.

Interpretation: It's your mess, you clean it up yourselves you old fellows.

I had to turn to my aunty Hilda who is now deceased... and she was one of the cleaners of our church. "Aunty Hilda will you help me clean up the mess please?" She smiled at me and said "Yeah, the young ones aren't doing it. We've got to do it".

We did clean up the spilled food. Older folks, we have to clean up that which we have messed up. That's part of the interpretation: clean up to make it possible for the next generation to come through. I went back to my dad who was still sitting in the front in the semi-darkness. I asked him, "Is there a meeting happening here tonight?" And he said "Something may happen".

The next thing suddenly, the youth started moving. The clean up has taken place. Aunty Hilda has come through and cleaned up. And then suddenly the youth started moving. Get ready for the 'suddenlies' people. The 'suddenlies' have already occurred in the Spirit. There has to be a physical manifestation of that which has taken place in the Spirit.

The youth started moving, bringing their musical instruments, their speakers, their microphones and all their gear, the drums, the pianos, the keyboards to the front of the church. The youth represent the new wineskins. It has to be a new wineskin to contain the outpouring of the new wine.

The next thing the keyboard was started being played. It was anointed. I could hear it in the memory of my dream. I've been a musician for 51 years. I know when I hear anointed music because there is an immediate response in my spirit man and I start to laugh, and dance and sing and shout and praise the Lord. Next thing they started to play and to sing. It was beautiful. It was anointed. It was so anointed that I started to dance. That was the dream.

All the people in the dream were my own people, Aboriginal people, Gabbi Kumera. Father God is going to move supernaturally, powerfully amongst my people in this ancient land. It's time. Nationally, God is going to move across this nation. The move of the Holy Spirit has begun and it is already manifesting itself out there in various parts of the nation. We need Him to come now. Let's pray for Him to come.

Prayer

Father we release this word to the people here today, Father may you come, may you act, may your people respond to this and move in perfect sequence with you in this your church, in this fellowship, in the name of Jesus, impact your people. Those who have ears let them hear what the Spirit of the Lord says to you today in Jesus' name and let them respond accordingly. Because everyone will be salted with fire. Amen

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Korean Methodist Church
The church : towards a common vision

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**DAY 25. 3rd July *Keep your lamps burning:* Luke 12:35-36; Matthew 25:1-13:
Joe Stuurman, Elder of Zillmere Congress, Queensland**

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning (Luke 12:35 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 6: it is Christ who by the gift of the Spirit confers the forgiveness, the fellowship, the new life and the freedom which the proclamation and actions promise; and it is Christ who awakens, purifies and advances in people the faith and hope in which alone such benefits can be accepted.

The ten Virgins

The difference between the wise and foolish virgins is, some were ready and others were not, both groups however were initially waiting expectantly.

Could it be a result of not recognising the times and seasons we are in, due to complacency? Are we listening to the wrong voices that want our attention, a cacophony of sound. Do you have too much of the world in you that dulls your hearing of the still small voice? How do we come back to our first love?

In this transition we can redeem the time to make adjustments necessary to buy and purchase oil for our lamps. Which means spending time with God? This needs to be a heartfelt decision to close off distractions that are the portals of this world.

Let us then open heavenly portals by being Heavenly minded and focussed. Do not fall asleep in the 11th hour as we are so close to His coming. Jesus will only come back to those that love and want Him, so look up and look to Him with expectation.

We are in a season of transition, therefore make the necessary choices that confront you, It maybe hard to make some decisions but God does not place us in a position that you can't endure. Step out and walk into a new realm of faith that is there, as the church age closes, the Kingdom age begins.

As a wise virgin, wait well and God bless you as you come up higher in the things of God.

Prayer

Father, We can get off track over time in administration duties and so we tend to make assumptions about you. Then we enter what's called a slippery slope that takes us away from you because we've been caught up in the concerns of the world. Help us seek you God, humble ourselves to seek your Face so we can be realigned with the Spirit of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - National Council of Churches in Korea
Marriage Discussion Paper

DAY 26. 4th July Fire on the earth: Luke 12:49-53 Pastor Andy Collins

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled (Luke 12:49 NIV)

BOU Par1: they acknowledge that none of them has responded to God's love with a full obedience; they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people.

As I write this, I must admit to deep hesitancy. I feel nervous writing it. Why? Well, I *know* what Jesus means and its implications. This passage is a wake-up call to many churches in Australia. We are encouraged to be loving, accepting, non-judgmental, full of grace and inclusive. Such qualities are noble and sorely needed in our society where so many have been ill-treated and marginalised. Church is such a *nice, safe* place.

But what of the situations I read about in churches beyond our borders? Just this week, I listened to a brother in Christ from Indonesia, who spoke about the brutal treatment he received at the hands of radical Muslim extremists in Java. Dragged out of his Bible College, hands bound and face covered, he found himself in the middle of a murderous crowd: "*Renounce Jesus or die!*" Well, he didn't renounce Jesus and he did die as a result. Twice. He had the photos to prove it. Gruesome and graphic. His head basically severed from his body. Both times he died, he speaks of going into the wonderful presence of the Lord Jesus Himself. It is a great testament to the Holy Spirit's resurrection power that he is so alive and whole today. But I found myself wondering how I would cope under the same circumstances.

In this passage today, Jesus boldly declares that He has come to stir things up. No longer would the world be the same once He entered it. Twelve chapters into Luke's Gospel, we see that all around Him. Many flock to Him, but just as many are repulsed by Him. He is even at loggerheads with His own flesh and blood. Jesus has come to bring NOT peace on earth, but DIVISION. Many accept His peace, but just as many reject it. As believers in 21st Century Australia, we cannot ignore the reports we are hearing regularly from the Middle East and beyond of hundreds of our fellow believers being beheaded, hung and crucified because they won't deny that precious Jesus is their Lord and Saviour. Will such extremism reach our shores?

We live in a time and place where as a society, we are encouraged to be all-embracing. That works well when things are going well. But we all know that more and more, the name of Jesus causes great offense. **Jesus**. The name means "*God Saves*", and the Bible tells us what we are saved from. **Sin**. You notice that I placed those two words in bold type. **Jesus** and **sin**. But we're not exactly bold in speaking out about them, are we? We know all too well how people get stirred up when we mention Jesus and sin, especially in the same sentence. So, in the spirit of multiculturalism and tolerance, we stay silent.

I made a decision to change that in my own life this past week. Without going into detail, I found myself trying to comfort a very disturbed woman I encountered on the street. All went well until I uttered the words "*Jesus loves you*". I noticed a change all right... a change for the worse. I then had to endure a barrage of spit, fists and foul language. It's no wonder people choose not to get involved. But deep inside, I felt, "*What an honour!*" May that feeling grow, and may any fear or hesitation decrease, Lord!

Offending people wasn't a good enough excuse for Jesus. He became *personally* involved with what was happening on planet Earth. I hear His pain as He utters those words, "*I wish it were already kindled*". Wouldn't it be great if people just accepted God's unconditional love? But they don't. How that continues to break His heart. Still, it didn't stop Him leaving His comfort zone. May it not be stop us from leaving ours. Even when we are offended or abused, may we continue to go, no matter the cost! Because, really, "*What an honour!*"

Prayer: *Ask the Lord to give you the courage to speak to people about Him. Ask Him also to strengthen you so that you are not offended at peoples' reactions, but can truly understand what an honour it is to be insulted, persecuted or slandered because of your love for Jesus. Rejoice and be glad! May God bless you richly!*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, Synod of NSW

27. 5th July ***Judgment, abiding and fire*** John 15: 1-9: Luke 16:19-31
Anne Hibbard

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:6-7 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 10: "It will commit its ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture."

What makes a place fit to live in or even visit. When I was in the United States I ended up visiting Cedar Rapids in the time of a flood. When the waters went down the people dreaded going back home to find what sticker was placed on their home. Different coloured stickers meant different things. If they found a certain colour sticker on their house they weren't even allowed to go in. The place was not safe. It was deemed "not inhabitable".

Some people have gone through the devastation of fire and flood in recent times in Australia. When they return to their homes they can no longer enter them. We haven't experienced fire or flood but my husband and I have had our home declared uninhabitable or not fit for living. We have a home on the central coast of NSW and visited regularly to recover after ministry in Sydney. Being both ministers in all our over 30 years of married life we have never lived in our own home. We bought a house many years ago and rented it out. When we had paid off most of our loan on our house we decided to have it as a retreat. We took great joy in renovating in and finding beautiful furniture to put in it. Whenever we came back to our house we would go through the house and rejoice and give thanks to the Lord for our wonderful it was and for its provision. One day we had been away for a few weeks and came back ready to give thanks to God. We had special thanks to be given because we had finally paid off the loan and the house was now ours in deed. We entered the house with praise on our lips and then received an enormous shock. Everywhere was thick black mould in spores throughout most of the house, all over the furniture, walls and ceiling. You could not even breathe. You could feel the mould spores in the air. The hot water tap was running. We called the plumber and he said the washer had burst and caused the damage. The insurers came and to our great relief confirmed the claim. We praised God that it was all covered except for a small excess. They called a hygienist. The place was declared uninhabitable and any workman coming in had to wear proper masks and protection. In three of the affected rooms and the hall, the ceiling, walls, and our new timber floors had to be removed and destroyed. All blinds, and our new furniture and linen had to be thrown away as they were contaminated.

The only way for our home to become fit for living again was to be partly demolished and for everything contaminated to be thrown away. Reconstruction work could not happen until the hygienist came and declared it to be mold free.

I am now writing this in our home almost a year after this catastrophe for us. Sun is streaming in the window and I thank the Lord that the work is finally finished and we have started the long process of getting replacements for all that was lost. Now we can dwell in it again and restore with the Lord.

In our passage today, John continues what is called Jesus' final farewell speech on the night he was betrayed. He speaks about dwelling or remaining. The original Koine Greek word is *menw* μένω. This word means "to stay, remain, live, dwell, abide; to be in a state that begins and continues, yet may or may not end or stop".

We came and went from our house on the Central Coast. In some respect we more like visitors. The problems came unnoticed because we weren't abiding. Jesus wants to make a permanent home in us, and he wants us to make a permanent home in him. Church is not about visiting Christ every so often maybe on Sundays or a short devotion time each day. It is about being in and becoming a permanent dwelling place of the Lord.

How can we become this dwelling place? How can we be fit for the Lord to live in? Our house wasn't fit for us to live in. It had become uninhabitable because of the growing mold. What needed to happen wasn't just for us to come home. Although that was a beginning to address the problem. The root cause, the burst washer had to be dealt with and then the eradication of the mold and everything contaminated had to be "thrown into the fire and burnt" so to speak for rebuilding to occur. For us to become a dwelling where Christ dwells, sin in our life has to be dealt with. Until this happens we can't live in Christ and he can't live in us. However we can't deal with the sin ourselves, only Christ can. As the insurance covered the cost of all the demolition and the restoration, Jesus Christ covers the cost of removing our sin (justification) and making us new (sanctification). As it says in the Basis of Union paragraph 10 "the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture". These two are the two holy flames in our life – the fire of repentance (justification) and the fire of revival (sanctification). Both are Christ's gift of grace to us through His blood and the Holy Spirit. The only excess we need to pay is faith, and even that is a gift from God.

Prayer: *Dear Father, thank you that Christ your son wants to find His dwelling in us and he wants us to dwell in him. Forgive us for being visitors instead of abiders. Teach us about abiding always and never leaving. Thank you that Jesus Christ dealt with our sin upon the fire of the cross so that we can become that dwelling place. Thank you that His holy flame empowers us to live a Christ like life full of fruit, for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Presbyterian Church of India
Chan Unity, doctrine and worship working group

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**28. 6th July *The sun stopped shining* : Luke 23:44-49 Rev Alistair Macrae
Past President Uniting Church in Australia**

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining (Luke 23:44-45b NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself " (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin.

The death of Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith. The One we claim to be the incarnate Son of God was crucified by and for our sin in order that we might know renewed and transformed life in Christ. Usually we try to understand Jesus' death, its causes and its effects, in human terms. But Luke reminds us to keep our vision of God's reconciling work in Christ big. Cosmic in fact. As St Paul reminds us in Romans 8 it is the whole creation that 'waits with eager longing...to be set free from bondage to decay'. Here in Luke's account of the death of Jesus we are reminded of the cosmic dimensions of God's ministry in and through Jesus. 'From noon on, darkness came over the whole earth until three in the afternoon'. Even the sun in the heavens shielded its eyes from the unfolding horror of a world which would crucify its Saviour. When

Jesus breathed his last the curtain in the Temple split from top to bottom. Matthew's account adds: 'The earth shook and the rocks were split. Tombs opened...'

Matthew pictures the very foundations of creation being disturbed. Again, this picture is entirely consistent with Paul's great hymn to the cosmic Christ in Colossians 1: 15-20. 'In him *all things* were created...in him *all things* hold together...and through him God was pleased to reconcile *all things*, whether in earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross'.

The Assembly theme is 'hearts on fire'. We pray that the Holy Spirit not only sets our hearts aflame with the gospel but that the Spirit will 'come and renew the face of the earth'.

Prayer:

*Living God, who raised Jesus from the dead,
come to your church afresh to heal and renew us.
Set our hearts on fire with confidence in your healing power.
Heal our divided and damaged hearts.
Heal the enmities that divide people.
Heal the wounded earth and lead us into gentler ways of living.
Lead us in the ways of peace-making in the spirit of the Prince of Peace.
Lead us into justice-seeking in the power of Christ the reconciler.
Lead us deeper into your love, Triune God,
That we may serve you and our neighbour with joy, now and always.
Amen.*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Protestant Christian Church in Bali
Assembly Standing Committee

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29. 7th July Fire on the beach: John 21:1-14 Rev Ron Brookman

When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread (John 21:9 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 3: On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.

*I'm going fishing!
Me too!*

In the wake of the death and mysterious resurrection of Jesus, Peter, James, John and 4 other disciples turned back to the work they knew. Things were very different now. The Man who'd led them, served them, taught them and changed them so radically, was no longer constantly present with them. He would suddenly appear, speak words to them, somehow supercharged with hope and reassurance, then would disappear as suddenly as He came to them. Whether it was to relax, escape, find some solace in the familiar, or to reflect on His violent death, now seen, not as a fullstop, but as a colon, we don't know. But it was certainly a time of transition for the disciples, bewildering and uncertain.

Take some time to reflect on uncertainties in your life.

Take some time to reflect on uncertainties in our church's life and future.

What emotions do they elicit?

The disciples toiled all night and caught not a thing, not as much as a single sardine. Quite depressing. Times of transition, times of uncertainty can be. Times when we're caught in the in-between.

Just as night was giving way to day, the voice boomed across the sea.
'Children'. Beloved. You, who are weak, but cared for.

'Do you have any fish?' The question only confirmed their weakness, their inability in their own strength.

'Cast the net on the right side, and you will find some!' Sheer grace. Help from the One who placed the fish in the sea!

'It could only be the Lord!' Typically impetuous, Peter couldn't make it to land fast enough!

'Bring some of the fish you've caught!' How gracious. The Lord sets it up but gives them the recognition! He blesses and affirms their work.

A charcoal fire was in place, the aroma of barbequed fish welcomed them, promising sustenance to recover from their long night. And freshly baked bread, set out by He, who *is* the Bread of Life.

Come and have breakfast!

He took the bread and gave it to them. How could the words, "This is my Body, broken for you," not resound in their hearts, not remind them of the new covenant He had made with them? How could those words not resonate with the implicit promise of His being with them every time they ate and remembered?

This was the third time the risen Jesus appeared to them. John gives no further account of His appearing. He concludes His gospel with this appearance and the 3 words of commission to Peter, *and to us*. He continues to reappear to us, if not manifestly through His Spirit. He continues to meet us in the dark nights, to show us where to cast our nets, to invite us to join Him in the Meal, and to feed His sheep.

Take some time to reaffirm Jesus' presence amid your uncertainties. Ask Him to lead you through.

Take some time to reaffirm Jesus' presence in the uncertainties of our Church's life and future, to ask Him to guide and lead as the Assembly meets next week.

Be stirred in faith! Jesus stands among us. The fire burns.

Rev Ron Brookman

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - Protestant Church in Maluku
Eldership in uniting church

DAY 30. 8th July *Hearts on fire:* Lk24:13-35; Eph1:18 Rev Dr Robert Brennan

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us (Luke 24:32 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 5. "The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church."

It is so, so easy to become entangled in the events of the day. The reported or too often misreported events around us move us to sadness and incomprehension. The world and its

seemingly insoluble problems move us to despair and the counsels of despair. Walking to Emmaus, the two must have been in deep shock and grief and not yet ready to wonder how they might live in a world where their most cherished dreams and hopes have been shattered.

Sadly we know from experience that people who have gone through profoundly distressing events like these often have profoundly changed lives filled with cynicism, hurt and bearing the scars of the past. When such trauma is linked to their faith it is common to see people reject all they ever learnt and try something new. Their expectations of God are reduced to the limits of what they can now safely imagine. In reality their faith in an all-powerful deity is too only being able to see a "God" who is not great. Our pain and circumstances make it impossible to see the God who is really there. We declare to ourselves and possibly to God, "No! You cannot be like I was taught!"

Alas, like the pair on the road to Emmaus, we too in our pain cannot see the one who is in plain sight. This pair is given a marvelous gift. They could have so easily rejected it, saying we hurt too much to talk about our loss. They could have missed the ahah! moment if they failed to ask the "stranger" in. These would have been normal reactions. When we are disillusioned in hurt and pain it is all too easy to ignore the gift of God which will enable us to see again unlimited hope in Christ.

The pair listened to the man retell the story of God's relationship with his people and the hope of salvation. All this they knew that they knew. Why was this man telling them this again? "We know this." They listened without really listening. Why? They needed to relearn or rather to see it all afresh from a new vantage point. It is only after the moment of insight do they begin to realise that what they thought that they knew about God was remarkably less than what God was actually on about. In the moment of insight their grief and pain is turned around and their faith renewed.

The end result is a faith renewed and deepened and transformed by the fire of God burning within them. Rather than living with the pain, confusion and disappointment they find something new. It would have been so easy to have gone on redefining their hope to be not more than their disappointment could bear. It would have been easy to lower their expectations of life with God and to reject and even despise those who still enthusiastically treasured God. That may well have been the likely outcome if God had not directly intervened, repeatedly, at length and hammering home what should have been obvious in the act of breaking bread. If we find it hard to see such a great a hope do not despair. It took a lot to get the pair on the road to Emmaus to the moment of insight. May we finally hear God's re-explanation of Christ's story and may our hearts burn within from the encounter.

Prayer : *Lord may we hear your truth for us afresh. Make our hearts burn within and change the whole world.*

Rev Rob

Pray for: partner - The Church of Christ in Thailand Working group on relations with other faiths

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DAY 31. 9th July Tongues of fire: Acts 2:1-21 Rev Dr Dean Drayton

They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them Acts 2:3 NIV)

Basis of Union: Paragraph 3: The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a

tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

It was Pentecost, a jubilee of fifty days after the resurrection, and it said the disciples were all together in the one place. A panoramic wood carving in the Upper Room chapel in Nashville has 120 people gathered together, the number of believers Peter addressed in the days prior to Pentecost (Acts 1: 15) for the purpose of electing Matthias to replace Judas as an apostle. I had always envisaged just 12 disciples, but there is the likelihood of a much larger number. (A few less than an Assembly gathering).

That changes the dynamics. A large room or rooms and suddenly unexpectedly it happened. The sound of a cyclone shook the entire house. And more than a hundred fiery tongues appeared each resting upon a disciple. Violent noise and threatening flames.

A little more than red candles and spoken words.

The Basis of Union puts it this way. "God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation."

And it all began with incredible power as recorded in this passage - The Holy Spirit thundering with a divine blowtorch as a pledge and foretaste of God's purpose for the whole creation. And the impossible begins. But where is the thundering now?

In 2 Kings 2 Elisha asks the prophet Elijah for a double portion of his spirit as Elijah is about to be taken away by God. "you have asked a hard thing: yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted." said Elijah. As they continued walking Elisha suddenly saw the chariot of fire and the fiery horses take Elijah in a whirlwind. He did see the power of God in action and received the double portion of his Spirit.

Here there is no asking for the Spirit or power, or needing to know what to see, here is the fulfilling of Jesus risen words in Acts 1:5 that the Father's promise will come, and "you will be baptized with(by) the Holy Spirit not many days from now" "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses."

It began with a bang. Lord jumpstart us again.

Prayer. *We thank you God for the super abundance of all that you do in Jesus Christ. In his death and resurrection he goes beyond forgiveness of the past and gives us a new future alive with the Holy Spirit. And with your Holy Spirit there is no tame, endless speaking, but action that comes upon us as we live in your promise. We ask you to thunder in our midst and be a blowtorch on us and leave us with hearts and lives on fire for the sake of the one whom we love, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner, The Church of North India. Pray for renewal+ revival within the Uniting Church as Assembly is almost here. Pray for safe arrival for all who are beginning to travel to Perth.

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DAY 32. 10th July Met by fire - Saul's conversion : Acts 26:12-18

Rev Dr Dean Drayton

About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me' (Acts 26:13-14 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 4: Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

The group on the road to Damascus stop, shocked by an unexpected happening in each of the three accounts Acts has Paul's conversion. "I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions." "About noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me". "a light from heaven flashed around him" He hears "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me." Paul's startled question "Who are you Lord?", bring the words that Paul could never forget, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting".

In Gal 1:12 he says the gospel he received was not of human origin, but received as an apocalypse of Jesus Christ. Apocalypse is the Greek word used. Translating this as a revelation as is normally done is inadequate for what Paul is describing here. Heaven is opened to him with a light that is brighter than the sun. All the others see the light, but only Paul hears the voice. Only Paul is blinded, his companions are not.

Last Anzac Day a researcher of the exploding fireball meteor over Chelyabinsk Russia in 2013 claimed that a meteor was the light that Paul saw, three times as bright as the sun, the intensity of which blinded him. It had to happen. If it was not a psychological experience then sooner or later what happened would be explained away by science. In fact only Paul was blinded.

No, Paul did not confuse a meteor with the appearance of Jesus. It was this apocalypse of Jesus Christ that imploded in upon him and his life that is the key event. His life forever after revolved around this crucified Lord.

Paul was blinded so that he could see. It is Jesus that led him to subvert the Roman Empire with grace, and shape the future of Europe and the world.

Here as the Basis of Union puts it, "Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rule and renews them as his Church."

In what strange ways can Christ renew us as his Church in and through this Assembly? In Christ heaven is opened to us. The light here is overwhelming. As 1 John 1:5 puts it, "this is the message we heard from him and declare to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness." It is not so much a Damascus Road experience we want, but the overwhelming presence of the power of light and fire in our midst.

Prayer *You O Lord are the Light of the world. Let your light be so bright for us, that with the fire of the Holy Spirit, we may see anew together, and be empowered to move beyond the limits we place on ourselves and your Church. Come to us in strange ways so that we may know that this is you, and not just words, O Word of God. Amen.*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The church of South India . Pray for work of Uniting Prayer and Fasting and the prayer rally today at Nedlands Uniting, and through the week. .

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33. 11th July *Tested by fire:* 1 Cor 3:10-17
Pastor Andy Collins, Newtown Mission. New South Wales

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work (1 Corinthians 3:12-13 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 18. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life,

Imagine what it must be like to stand by and watch your life's work go up in smoke? Feeling helplessly small and ill-equipped to prevent everything you've worked so hard for being completely consumed. Imagine your house, all your possessions and priceless memories vanishing. All you see left is the foundations of the building!

We've all seen or heard of raging fires sweeping through the Aussie bush, destroying everything in their wake? Prior to becoming a pastor, I worked with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. In Summer, that meant fighting fires! I remember vividly one year being sent to the Myall Lakes, where a stray boat flare let off on New Year's Eve started a huge bushfire. I felt ridiculously small next to this raging inferno, with flames reaching hundreds of metres into the air. There was little we could do. Afterwards, it was difficult to imagine that this place was thick forest. There was nothing left but ash and the occasional burnt stump. Such was the power of the fire that everything else was consumed as if it never existed.

Paul has some very sobering words for the Corinthian church and for us. There is a foundation that has been laid for us. In fact, God went to *great lengths* to ensure that this foundation was solid. Have a read also of 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Paul reminds them exactly what foundation they must build on: The gospel that was preached to them involved the death and a resurrection of Christ Himself. By it we were saved. Eternally saved from fire. Good news indeed. As the angel said to Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "*Name the child Jesus, for He will save His people from their sin*". This foundation is a wonderful one, and it has endured for centuries.

We have the responsibility to choose very wisely what we use to build on this foundation. Often, we seek new and meaningful ways to reach out to the world around us. Some of these are useful. However, we must be very careful not to dilute or change the message that was handed down to us from God. One day, we will stand before our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Himself. All of our works will be tested with fire. If I have built on the foundation He laid of salvation from the power of sin and death, I will find that my works will be like pure gold and precious jewels. They will endure a scorching fire. However, if I neglect this foundation, like wood, hay or straw, all of my work will have vanished in the flames. All that time, labour and passion will have been in vain unless I have guided others to their Saviour and mine. As the Lord looks into my eyes, indeed through to my very soul, I long for His "*Well done*". I would hate to have Him ask me, "*Well?*"

Let's not be wooed by the latest, greatest method of reaching people unless there is a firm foundation. "*It's all about community*": Yes, we are to be a loving community... Our motivation is that we are a loving *redeemed* community. "*Church is all about love*": Well, God's love was costly. There was a cross, there was blood, there was His one and only Son... "*Go green!*": Well, read Romans 8:19-21. It seems that creation looks at the redeemed people of God and declares, "*We want the same freedom and glory that they have*". Get the picture? Psalms 127:1 declares, "*Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain*". Isn't it worth spending the time humbly and honestly asking the Lord to show you where you need to stop what you're doing because ultimately it is laboring in vain.

Prayer: *Lord, please show me where I am laboring in vain. I long to build on that wonderful foundation of the precious sacrifice of Your only Son to rescue the entire world from the power of sin and death. Unless I do, then all of my efforts are futile anyway. Give me the courage and humility to change. When finally we are face to face, I long to hear You say, "Well done", not, "Well?" In the precious name of Jesus my Saviour I pray. AMEN*".

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

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**34. 12th July *Transformed in fire: 2 Cor 3:7-18;*
Colette Williams South Australia**

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 12: The Uniting Church will seek ways in which the baptized may have confirmed to them the promises of God, and be led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptized.

Paul has been comparing the glory (splendour) of the old covenant, which came with the Law chiseled in stone, with the surpassing glory of the new covenant, which will last forever, and which God has written in our hearts.

The glory that shone on Moses' face, radiant from being in the presence of God, nevertheless faded over time. In contrast our glory, which is the Lord's glory reflected in us, will only grow and increase as we are transformed more and more into his likeness.

How does this happen? Verse 18 says that we are "*being transformed* into his likeness," which is a passive and an on-going process, as the Holy Spirit does his work within us.

But we also have a part to play. We don't become more and more like Jesus just through the passing of time.

In John 15 we have the wonderful analogy of the vine and the branches, and Jesus' profound words, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you." (v.4) Here is the secret to it all. As we remain in Jesus, his life flows through us, and his character becomes our character, his qualities our qualities. They are given to us as a gift as we live in him. Jesus said, "My peace I give you." He doesn't just give us peace, he gives us *his* peace. "...that my joy may be in you..." He doesn't just give us joy, he gives us *his* joy. "Remain in my love." We don't have to generate our own love, but allow Jesus' love to flow through us as we live out our union with him.

The more we remain in him and he lives his life through us, the more we will be transformed into his likeness, and the greater the glory as we increasingly reflect him.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus, may it be our primary goal to remain in you, and then everything else will flow from there. May we regard it as just as essential to our spiritual well-being as breath is to our physical well-being, for without you we can do nothing of lasting value. Give us grace that we may reflect you, for the sake of the world. Amen.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Korean Christian Church in Japan
Today Assembly begins in the afternoon with orientation and essential business proposals. Pray for all the delegates as they settle in. Pray also for Stuart McMillan as he is installed tonight as the President of the Uniting Church

**35. 13th July Discerning the fire: 1 Thess 5: 19-22; 1 John 4:1-4 ; 2 Tim 1:4-6;
Uncle Bill Hollingsworth**

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. 1 Thes 5:19-22

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 John 4:1 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 17: “The Uniting Church will keep its law under constant review so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of humanity under God’s sovereign grace.”

One of the dangerous experiences is that which comes from Satan and his minions. They’ll wait for you to be unaware of what’s going on. You might be sitting and listening and then you suddenly get drowsy. Then something happens and you think “That’s the Lord”. But the bible says “try the spirit”, because the devil can slip stuff in. By receiving it you’re giving ground to it.

And so one night I was going to pray and wait on the Lord. I told Him that I wanted to see Him face to face. I waited there till about 2 am. in the morning. I started to get drowsy and dozed off a little. And then I heard this amazing sound like an earthquake, a vibration coming through. And this thing got hold of me and I felt so good. There was gooseflesh and tingling of the spine. A voice said “This is the Lord now”. And then very faintly in the background I heard another say : “Try the spirit”

And so I snapped awake and I said. “Lord, I’m no match for Satan but you are. I’m taking my stand by faith on the grounds of the precious blood of covenant and I’m totally dependent upon you to ascertain whether this is of God or not. If this is of God I will gladly receive it, if its not I totally reject it.”

After I said that I waited and the thing left me and went away. And I thought “Wow, how easy it is”. I dozed off again and it happened again a second time. I went through the same process again and it went again and never came back.

So that taught me to try the spirits. Not to just swallow anything. There’s so much rubbish out there: people swallowing so much.

And we wonder why. The scripture warns us again and again about the end time times. “*They will turn away their ears from the truth.*” 2 Tim 4:4

People don’t realize that if you continue to turn away your ears from the truth that God will send you a strong delusion.

For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie
(2 Thessalonians 2:11 NIV)

So we don’t realize how great God is but how dangerous it is to ignore him and to turn away from the truth. We’re not dealing with temporal things. We are dealing with eternity. So those sorts of things taught me a lesson that I’ll never forget.

Prayer for Discernment

“Lord, I’m no match for Satan but you are. I’m taking my stand by faith on the grounds of the precious blood of covenant and I’m totally dependent upon you to ascertain whether this is of God or not. If this is of God I will gladly receive it, if its not I totally reject it.”

1. **Pray for:** Unitingworld partner - The National Council of Churches in the Philippines

Pray for Assembly as it has its first full day.

Pray for strength for Stuart McMillan as he chairs for wisdom, clarity, courage, strength and protection. Give thanks to God for our outgoing President Andrew Dutney.

The Assembly Standing Committee will be bringing proposals today. Please pray especially during these times today when their proposals will be discussed. See Appendix 2 to see what these proposals could possibly be. Pray over them.

Business times when proposals will be discussed needing churches and individuals to pray today are 11:00am – 12:15pm ; 2:40 – 3:10 pm ; 7:30 – 8:30 pm.

Pray also for the community working groups at 4:00- 5:30 pm today, Tuesday and Wednesday where delegates consider proposals, that the Lord Jesus would speak in the groups.

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DAY 36. 14th July *Refined by fire – Scrambled Squadron: 1 Peter 1:3-9; Ephesians 2:6-7; Romans 8: 31-39* Pastor (Uncle) Bill Hollingsworth

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire —may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 16. The Uniting Church sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals personally with people, would have God’s loving care known among people, and would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant.

Have you ever heard of Arthur Matthews? I don’t know where he came from, but he spent some time in Adelaide. He was a missionary in China. He used to write editorials for the overseas missionary fellowship’s paper. They put them together in a devotional book, like “a daily light” , for over a month. (1)

And in it he’s got some amazing insight in using illustrations in life itself . The illustration are really clear, precise and also relevant . He looks at the Hebrew people going through the fiery furnace. And the way he brings it out is amazing. And he talks about Daniel in the lion’s den, and also about prayer. He says we aren’t adopting the best method of prayer.

He talks about the “ **Scrambled Squadron**”.

Towards the end of the second world war when Germany had conquered Europe, Germany had finally mounted the operation “Sea Lion”. They sought to bomb Britain out of the sea and to finish the war by defeating Britain.

So they sent all their bombers over to drop bombs on Britain.

Because Britain didn't have much to respond with, they had to devise a strategy to stop this happening and to beat the Germans.

So they organized what's called "The Scrambled Squadron" – a squadron of Spitfire fighter planes. . They had to be ready at a moment's notice.

As soon as anything appeared on the radar screen, that was suggesting a bomber squadron was coming over from Germany, the pilots had to scramble, get in their planes and take off.

But why they had to be so quick was to get altitude. So they got up as high as they could above the bombers, so that when the bombers came in towards their target, suddenly the German pilots found these planes coming at them, from out of the sun above them. And it threw them into consternation. They couldn't concentrate on their targets at the same time as coping with fighters coming at them from above.

The lesson that Arthur Matthews put up is this. We are fighting our battles from the wrong position. We are seated together in heavenly places far above all principalities and powers. We are already in a position of victory. Our squadron leader is the greatest war leader that you could ever have, that has ever been.

And instead of us fighting from a position of victory, we are talking about going on to victory, when we are already positioned in a position of victory.

If we start to take our place as the Melchizedek priestly order as brought into being through our High Priest, who's ripped the veil and given us access to the throne of grace and the mercy seat, our prayers will have confidence and assurance. And then we are going to get different results than what we are getting at present. But if we are trying to fight the enemy above us from bunkers then we will get nowhere. .

Prayer:

Reveal to us Heavenly Father, your will and purpose and fulfill that perfect will through the power of the Holy Spirit

I've been sitting here for the last hour contemplating, meditating, calling upon you to intervene. I thank that this is an opportunity Lord, that's come from you to record what you are doing. Lord you've already decided and determined the outcome.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us and gave himself for us. You obtained the victory and now you are calling us to share the spoils of victory with you, and to go into the enemies camp and Lord to destroy that which is contaminated and defiling, Redeem the hearts and lives of men and women, and rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from hell and the grave. To weep for the erring one and lift up the fallen. To tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save

Father, We thank you so much that you hear our cry. We trust in you. You know the way we take. Lord we thank you in the name of Jesus that this is the way ordained by you, and that as you lead us, you inevitably lead us in triumph. All the glory, power and might comes to you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are, the Father of glory to whom be all the honour, praise and glory. For this we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

OMF Born for battle Arthur Matthews

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea

Continue to Pray for Assembly. Today the appointment of the new general Secretary will be taking place. The nominee is *Ms Colleen Geyer*. Pray for the Lord's leading if he wants Coleen to be confirmed in this role.

Give thanks to the Lord of the work of Rev Dr Terence Corkin as he concludes at the end of this year.

Nominees for President-elect will be announced. Begin to earnestly pray for the Lord's choice for the President-Elect.

Assembly Standing Committee proposals will continue 7:30 – 8:30 pm.

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37. 15th July Consuming fire : Heb 12:18-29 Pastor Andy Collins

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29 NIV)

Basis of Union Paragraph 1: the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever.

Our family has a nice holiday spot on the Myall Lakes. I spend most of my time there swimming, walking, catching fish and reading. Lots of reading! On a recent week away, I managed to get through an enormously thick book over 1,000 pages long on the rise and fall of Communism. It covered the formative years, full of hope and possibility as centuries of rule under the tyrannical kingdom of the Tsars was ended! People held onto the belief that life would be better under this new form of government and lived in such a way as to see this eventuate.

It was far from perfect. It was heartbreaking to read afresh the awful impact that Communism had on tens of millions of people as one repressive kingdom was replaced with another. Crippling poverty and severe oppression by hypocritical power mongers who lived so well whilst murderously crushing any opposition or cry for change. Anybody who felt differently was too afraid to speak out for fear of being found out and sent to jail, exile or worse. And then walls were ironically built up to keep people from escaping this supposedly utopian society.

Yet people held on for change, never giving up. And the walls of the "kingdom" of Communism started to literally crumble. I shed tears as I read about the opening up of the Berlin Wall. It's hard to believe it's been over 25 years since the wall came down; I still remember watching in joyful disbelief with the rest of the world. I can just imagine the sheer relief that families felt being reunited after decades of separation. What must it be like to live with such a history of relentless oppression? How on earth do you possibly find any hope for change when the opposition is so very strong?

Sometimes I wonder what Australia will look like in 40 years, as I prepare to go to my permanent home, if I'm still around? All around me at the moment in Sydney, people are encouraged to build their own little kingdoms. It sounds so enticing, and I admire people taking on home loans. They will spend their entire lives paying off enormous mortgages just so that

they can have a patch of land and a house to call their own. Everything they do for the rest of their lives will revolve around the decision they make to buy their own home.

It's pretty cosy now, but who knows what the future holds? God only knows. If there's anything we can learn from history, nothing stays the same forever. And we certainly live in a time like Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24: War and rumours of war. Nation rising up against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Against such a backdrop, God's people are encouraged in verse 6: "*See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come*". The end when worldly kingdoms will be replaced with A KINGDOM THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN! It's not a popular message, and many are outspoken in their opposition to the Christian's world view that "*this life is not all there is*".

Peter states in chapter 3 of his second letter that the earth is "*reserved for fire*". All those things people currently spend their lives acquiring will be consumed because God has something FAR BETTER in store. Far better than 21st Century Australia? YEP! As somebody that God has chosen to receive this kingdom that knows no end, and as somebody who has "signed on the dotted line", make a decision today to devote yourselves to being "*thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe*". Such a lifestyle echoes the words of Jesus, who encourages His people to devote at least as much energy to eternal, incorruptible things as they do on temporal things that eventually break down (see Matthew 6:19-21).

Prayer: *Lord God, I ask for Your forgiveness. I get so consumed with things that are connected to this world. I take my eyes, ears and minds off You and the Kingdom that You have in store for us. It is my heart's desire that I can be thankful for all that I have and all that You have done for me. Develop in me an attitude of gratitude, for with such an attitude, my worship truly becomes acceptable to You. You alone are worthy of the highest praise! In Jesus' name, I pray. AMEN.*

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Presbyterian Church of Korea

Pray for Assembly:

Continue to pray for Assembly as it meets. Remember to keep praying for Stuart McMillan as he shares. Pray also for his wife Ros and his family for protection while he serves the church in this way.

The business sessions for today are below. Look to Appendix 2 to see what proposals may be coming. Check the Assembly website and Uniting prayer and fasting website to see updates on what proposals are coming. www.unitingprayerandfasting.com

11:00 – 12:30 pm Pray as Assembly Standing Committee proposals continue

2:00 – 3:30 Agency proposals

3:10 the first ballot for president-elect will take place. Continue to pray for the Lord's choice for our next President-elect.

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DAY 38. 16th July Disciplined in fire Rev 3:14-22 Fiona Blair, Pastor Avalon Beach Village Church, Advanced Candidate, (MOW).

14 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin^[a] of God's creation: 15 "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Revelation 3:14-18

Basis of Union Paragraph 4. The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work

Are we troubled by this passage?

What troubles me most is the 'lukewarm' metaphor that Jesus uses to describe aspects of his church. In its first century social context 'hot' and 'cold' are both positive descriptors; hot water is healing and salutary, cold water is refreshing and welcoming but lukewarm is describing something unpleasantly tepid, even nauseating.

Laodicea was considered one of the wealthiest cities of that time and region. It appears that economic and material wealth led Laodicean Christians to say 'I need nothing'. They substituted life in the Spirit for worldly riches and self sufficiency. As a result they lost their witness and became no different from other citizens of Laodicea. They became a 'lukewarm' church- something completely out of fellowship with Jesus.

What I find comforting in this passage is that Jesus sees it the way it is and speaks the truth about this situation. Jesus is the true and faithful witness to God's ways and he sees and names the nakedness, poverty and sickness of his church. The comforting part of course is that Jesus speaks and sees with eyes of love – he can only see us from the perspective of limitless love. What a relief! His love is unwearied, and his love acts in ways that we long for.

Jesus' action is an invitation to receive. He counsels the church to receive true riches from the proper source. He invites the church to make room for receiving true riches; gold that is fired and fresh from the furnace, proven pure and retaining all its beauty and lustre. This is from Christ only; he is rich! And he says "so buy from Me without money or price so that you may be rich". "Buy" does not imply that we can, by any work or merit of ours, purchase Christ's free gift; instead we 'buy' at the cost of our own self sufficiency. To make room for Christ's riches then is to part with sin and self-sufficiency, and hold fervently to the process of discipleship and to our faithful public witness of Christ.

Prayer;

"Wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked" – Jesus, how could we think we have no need for you?

God of Glory, God of Grace we are sorry. Forgive us for relying on our own self sufficiency and for believing that we can handle things on our own and not have to depend on someone else.

May we listen to your rebuke and then fall into your loving arms once again. May we hear you say to us "because I love you and want you to share in my riches, my glory and the new creation that is breaking forth, I am calling you to live by my Spirit and hold to your faithful public witness to me."

Jesus, you invite us to depend on you and we are so grateful and rejoice with 'yes'. Jesus, please continue to place us in situations where you show us how insufficient we are, and remind us that you are always enough; you are sufficient.

Amen.

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The Presbyterian Church of Korea

Pray for Assembly:

Continue to pray for election of President-elect. A second ballot will take place today if needed and declaration will happen at 3:15 pm .

10:00 – 10:30 a.m. and 4:00 pm Assembly Standing Committee proposals will continue

Today is the last day scheduled for ASC proposals so particularly pray today regarding the proposals on marriage. Although there is a place still tomorrow for general proposals that have not yet been determined.

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**39. 17th July *Coming in fire: Rev 19:11-15; 2 Thess 1:6-10*
Rev Ron Brookman, New South Wales**

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. (Rev 19:11-12

Basis of Union Paragraph 4: The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work

The thought of the Suffering Saviour, riding through the Heavens on a mighty white stallion to wage war, seems incongruent with His words of peace, with His refusal to fight the enemies who falsely accused, then crucified Him. He died being faithful and true to love, peace and righteousness. Risen and ascended He reigns in Heaven, waiting, while all His enemies are brought under His feet. The greater power of Love will prevail over the lesser, though apparently more fierce, powers of evil.

These principalities and powers, these world forces of darkness and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places, work relentlessly through human history to subvert God's purposes and glory in this present age. Fiercely luring people into their grip, they work their sinister purposes of destroying souls and lives, as they deceive, seduce, or draw into addictions, violence, and slavery, etc. Whether through Government corruption, multi-national avarice, war, terrorism, inhospitality to refugees, drug cartels, or as seemingly insignificant as one person's merciless revenge against another, these powers diminish and distort God's image in us, through injustice and unrighteousness.

A parable: The trooper lay for days in the forsaken battlefields of France, unable to move. His legs had been broken by the force of a grenade that had blown the lives of several of his mates to the netherworld. Finally rescued, he was stretchered to the makeshift medical camp for immediate surgery. Though gangrene had set in, the doctors hoped to save his legs. With primitive anesthetics he endured agony as contaminated flesh was cut away from his calves,

and some toes were amputated. The pain seemed merciless, but was the greatest act of mercy he could receive.

Jesus is a God of justice. Mercy, which always triumphs over judgement, endlessly streams from Heaven, through the gospel and the Word of the Cross. How urgent the task of proclaiming it! But like the need to excise rotten flesh from the trooper's diseased legs, to heal and strengthen them, sometimes mercy is expressed through judgement, through eradication of the forces of evil, and of people who align with it.

This is the fire of judgement. The Lord Jesus *'will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,'* bringing evil under His feet, in order to bring the fullness of His Kingdom, the new Heavens and Earth. Faithful and True, Jesus' authority to judge is reflected in the fierce flames in His eyes. Though this passage states that the armies, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses *in Heaven*, these peacemakers can also be seen as His Church below, armed with prophetic weapons of prayer, faith, love, truth and courage.

**Lord, give us wisdom to understand, and courage to stand, in Your truth.
Make us faithful to resist evil,
in our own lives;
in ways it seeks to defile the church;
and in the manifold ways dark powers and the spirit of the world bring injustice and
destroy lives.
Make us bold to pray for, proclaim and point to the peace of Your Kingdom. In these last
days of the Assembly lead us to stand courageously with You in faithfulness and truth.**

Rev Ron Brookman

Pray for: Unitingworld partner – The Protestant Evangelical Church in Timor

Prayer for Assembly: Today is a busy day in Assembly with many proposals coming forward.

Please continue to pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would truly be the living Head of the Uniting Church in Australia.

In the morning Agency proposals will be discussed.

In the afternoon 2:00 – 3:25 Synod and Presbytery proposals will be brought forward. 4:00 – 5:20 pm and 7:30 – 8:30 pm are earmarked as proposals.

These could still be outstanding decisions needed from proposals from the Assembly Standing Committee Proposals such as marriage, eldership etc. So please keep praying.

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DAY 40. 18th July The Lamb is its lamp Rev 22:9-27 Rev Dr Dean Drayton

It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp (Revelation 21 11:23 NIV)

Basis of Union Pr 3: God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to

serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

Fire and Light.

It is the light of the glory of God that not only has shone on us on the way but will shine on us at the end - which will be another beginning. The one who has let fire loose in our world, and in our lives, encourages us to know that we will see God's purposes for the creation come to pass. Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, is the one who has opened to us life lived in the promised presence of God. The first tree of life has been replaced with an even more blessed tree of life, the cross of Christ. The risen crucified Lamb will be the most brilliant light of the city and also our lives.

The ultimate invitation is there - come! When the refrain of our time is that we do not know where we come from, where we presently are, or where we are going, here is the light from the face of Christ, refracted and reflected, that shows us all that we need to know as to where we have come from, where we are now, and where in him the creation is headed. The glowing Shalom of God, known now in part, is the ultimate promise for us all.

We thank God that as we have met in this Assembly, and as we have prayed and fasted these 40 days, we have known those moments when our hearts were on fire, in worship witness and serving together. And then with this the awareness that decisions taken, attitudes reformed and life celebrated, point the way forward toward the creation, one day, finally ablaze with the glory of God.

Prayer *Lord, as those of us at Assembly return to our homes, and others of us finish the Sacred Season 40 days of prayer and fasting, we know that your prayer for us, and ours with you, is that your reign will come on earth as it is in heaven. For the moments of inspiration this week we praise you. For the times of reconciliation we praise you. For new insight into your death and resurrection we praise you. Hold us to your call to speak up for those suffering from systems of injustice. Hold us to your call to pray for those who are addicted and those in pain. And for all your blessings through this Assembly we give thanks. In Jesus name.*
deandrayton

Pray for: Unitingworld partner - The United Church of Christ in the Philippines

<p>Assembly: Today is a round up day with a small amount of time 9:10 – 10:30 am for final business and referrals. Continue to pray as sometimes these last business sessions can be very important. The second part of the morning is courtesies, and closing worship. Give thanks to the Lord for all He has done these 40 days. Please pray for safe travelling for all the delegates as they return home. Especially remember in your prayers Stuart McMillan for a time to restore after Assembly as he begins his journey over the next 3 years as President. Remember also to pray in the next few weeks for covering for the prayer team, those who have travelled from interstate and those who are from Perth.</p>

APPENDIX 1. Letter from the General Secretary Rev Terence Corkin to Uniting Prayer and Fasting

I have grabbed the little window of time that I have available while I am at the airport waiting for the flight home to send you some prayer points for the 14th Assembly. I will not offer you all the possible areas for prayer that are open to you but I draw your attention to the fact that all the Assembly papers will be available on the 14th Assembly website at <http://assembly2015.uca.org.au/proposals-and-reports/> Please read the proposals to get some ideas for prayer.

Among the more obvious prayer points are

- *the new President, Stuart McMillan,*
- *the appointment of the new General Secretary (the nominee is Ms Colleen Geyer),*
- *thanks for the faithful service of many over the last three years and particularly those mentioned in minutes of appreciation;*
- *the future shape of the UCA's work in remote Australia which will be coming in a report of a consultation to be held June 3 -5 and the fall out of changes from Frontier Services over the last three years.*
- *We have also asked Commissioner McClellan from the Royal Commission to speak with us but we're not sure whether that will come off yet.*

As well as the proposals and reports at the link provided you can also access the Broad Timetable (Document A1) which gives a sense of the flow of the meeting.

With respect to the timing of the business before the Assembly as that is reflected in the agenda I am sure you appreciate that it is a bit of a moving target. For those who are able to access it the 14th Assembly site will put up the daily timetable under the business papers. Also there will be an update emailed out electronically each evening. You can sign up for that from the Assembly website if you have not done so already.

I am sorry that this is a bit short on the details but I am sure the proposals document (and there will be more papers in the first week of June) will give you plenty of guidance.

I hope this assists in your praying for the Assembly.

Grace and Peace,
Terence

APPENDIX 2. PROPOSALS COMING TO ASSEMBLY AS OF 30TH MAY 2015

a) Minutes of appreciation brought to Assembly

Retiring President (Standing Committee)
Retiring General Secretary (Standing Committee)
Ms Maureen Postma (Christian Unity Working Group)
Rev Dr David Pitman (Worship Working Group)
Rev Dr Kerry Enright (UnitingWorld)
Dr Sureka Goringe (UnitingWorld)
Rev Gale Hall (Defence Force Chaplaincy)
Rev Seforosa Carroll (Working Group on Relations with other Faiths)

b) Assembly Standing Committee Proposals

1. Anglican-Uniting Church Dialogue: weaving a new cloth

That the Assembly adopt the document Weaving a New Cloth as the basis for ecumenical co-operation with the Anglican Church of Australia.

2. Threshold for Assembly and Standing Committee staff appointments

That the Assembly

1. determine that at least two thirds of the members present and voting must support the appointment or re-appointment of the General Secretary in order for such a proposal to pass; and
2. determine that for appointments made by the Standing Committee that at least two thirds of the members present and voting must support the appointment or re-appointment of the person in order for such a proposal to pass.

3. Staff of the assembly on the standing committee

That the Assembly

1. determine that any person who is Staff of the Assembly or of any of its agencies is ineligible for election to the Standing Committee. If a member of the Standing Committee accepts appointment as Staff of the Assembly or of any of its agencies then that member shall no longer be a member of the Standing Committee; and
2. that staff means a person who has a direct reporting line or accountability to the General Secretary or Associate General Secretary, or who is a member of the team or support staff who has a direct reporting line to that person;

4. Appointment of General Secretary):

That the Assembly appoint Colleen Geyer as the General Secretary of the Assembly for a period of six years from 1 January 2016.

5. Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse – regulation changes

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to make changes to the Regulations to any extent necessary to implement policies and practices deemed necessary in response to any recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

6. Theology of Marriage Discussion

That the Assembly

1. receive the report on 'The theology of marriage and same gender relationships within the Uniting Church';
2. affirm that Ministers continue to be free to accept or refuse requests to celebrate marriages within the constraints of the Marriage Act 1961 (CTH);
3. request the Standing Committee to explore how the UAICC and CALD communities can engage in further discussions about marriage and same-gender issues in culturally appropriate ways; and
4. request the Standing Committee to:
 - (a) establish a Task Group to investigate the implications of changing the Church's current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conduct of marriages;
 - (b) set appropriate Terms of Reference for this work, allowing for an exploration of the possibilities that this work may be undertaken in consultation with our ecumenical partners; and
 - (c) report, with appropriate recommendations, to the Fifteenth Assembly.

7. Eldership in the Uniting Church

That the Assembly

1. receive the report of the Task Group on Eldership;
2. amend Clause 19 of the Constitution to say:
ELDERS
19. Unless the Presbytery shall authorise otherwise:
 - (b) the Elders shall be members of the Church Council and shall comprise at least one half of its membership.
3. authorise the Standing Committee, on advice from the Legal Reference Committee, to amend:
 - (a) Regulation 3.1.2 (b) so that it reads:...

8. Covenanting Task Group

That the Assembly

1. receive the report;
2. (a) determine that a significant priority for its life during the next triennium is to explore with Congress what it would mean for the practices of the Church to recognise and affirm that First Peoples are sovereign Peoples;
- (b) request the Standing Committee to establish a process through which this exploration can be undertaken; and
- (c) encourage all Councils of the church, agencies and schools to explore with Congress what it would mean for their practices to recognise and affirm that First Peoples are sovereign Peoples.

9. Ministry of Pastor

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee, on advice from the Legal Reference Committee, to

1. (a) delete Regulations 2.3.3.a(ii) and 2.3.3(c)

PROCESS FOR THE SELECTION OF A PASTOR

2.3.3 (a) A person may make application for the ministry of Pastor by:

(ii) offering to serve the Church in an approved placement, through a written application to the Synod.

(c) A Synod body designated by the Synod shall have responsibility for considering and determining applications made under Regulation 2.3.3 (a)(ii). The procedures to be followed by the Synod body shall be approved by the Synod and shall include:

- (i) requests for confidential testimonials from an appropriate Minister, and the Church Council of the applicant's Congregation;
- (ii) an interview with the applicant;
- (iii) consideration of the applicant's:
 - (1) gifts and graces appropriate to the ministry of Pastor;
 - (2) spiritual maturity and sense of call;
 - (3) capacity for exercising this ministry and perceived potential to meet the required competencies for the ministry of Pastor;
 - (4) personality and character; and
 - (5) willingness to accept the doctrine, polity and discipline of the Church.

and to make any other consequential amendments; and

(b) remove the requirement of membership for a period of 12 months under Regulation 2.4.6(a) and replace it with a requirement of membership for no required period of time.

B) Proposals by UAICC (Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress)

1. Membership of the Assembly and ASC

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend

1. Regulation 3.3.8 (a) (i) so that it reads:

3.3.8 (a) The membership of the Assembly shall consist of:

(i) ex-officio members:

- the National Administrator Coordinator of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

2. Regulation 3.7.5.1 (a) (ii) so that it reads: "the Chairperson and the National Administrator Deputy Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress";

3. Regulation 3.7.5.1 (j) (i) so that it reads: "Secretaries of Synods, National Coordinator of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, the Associate General Secretary and the National Director, Theology and Discipleship".

2. Indigenous recognition in the Australian Constitution

That the Assembly 1. note the comment in the Congress report that there is a diverse set of views within Congress regarding Recognition in the Constitution;

2. continue to support Recognition as long as the form of recognition offered can be seen as a step towards and not a blockage to the larger issues of sovereignty and treaty; and

3. commit to work with Congress to educate members of the Church about the need for a treaty.

3. Doctrine of Discovery

That the Assembly

1. repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery, and its theological foundations as a relic of colonialism, feudalism, and religious, cultural, and racial biases that have no place in the treatment of First Peoples; and

2. affirm the WCC "Statement on the Doctrine of Discovery Impact on Indigenous Peoples", and encourage its consideration in the church and, in particular, in theological colleges.

4. Mapoon

1. request the Standing Committee to launch a new appeal for the building of a church at Mapoon; and

2. commit to work with Congress to raise the issue of compensation with the Queensland Government and the mining company for the destruction that was caused to the community.

5. Week of Prayer and Fasting

That the Assembly request the Standing Committee, in partnership with Congress, to facilitate an annual week of Prayer and Fasting which may in some years involve a pilgrimage to the national capital, and which has the aim of the deepening the Covenant relationship rather than the event being an end in itself

6. Memorial for Charles Harris

That the Assembly commit to work with Congress to establish a memorial for Rev Charles Harris at a place to be determined by Congress National Committee.

7. Living out the Covenant

That the Assembly

1. commit its members and programs to work with synods and other parts of the Church to continue to highlight the issues faced by First Peoples at this time, and to developing appropriate responses in partnership with Congress;
2. request the Standing Committee to continue to give attention to the way the various Councils of the Church give authority to Congress so that they can exercise real control of ministry and mission among First Peoples; and
3. support the Northern Regional Council of Congress' opposition to fracking on Aboriginal land, and convey this position to the Northern Land Council.

c) Proposal from Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry

Process for respectful consultation in the church (Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry)

That the Assembly

1. support the following process for the engagement of Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in discussion and discernment about developing a theology of marriage in culturally appropriate ways;
2. the process include requesting the President, in consultation with the Chairperson and National Coordinator of the UAICC and the Chairperson and National Director of the Assembly Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry Reference Committee:
 - (a) identify suitably gifted persons, women and men, older and younger, and to invite them to a gathering for story-telling and story-listening about:
 - i. What respectful processes occur and are used within their various cultures and language groups, for teaching / learning/sharing story, knowledge, new things;
 - ii. How decisions are made that are inclusive and respectful;
 - iii. What inclusion and working together look like – including different culture/language groups, genders, and ages;
 - iv. Explore any connections between the shared stories and the intentions of the first nine pages of the Manual for Meetings, and how understanding those connections might better assist God's people to include, empower, respect their diversity in unity in Christ;
 - (b) identify a place and gathering framework with time and space appropriate to the cultural diversity of the group for such a conversation / Talanoa / with the women and men, young and older, together and / or separate as is most appropriate;
 - (c) ensure that sufficient time is allowed in order that such a gathering has sufficient space for grace – for building the kind of safe place, genuine connections, and community envisaged in the Manual for Meetings, and is normal in how many communities exercise hospitality;
3. request the gathering to report to the Assembly Standing Committee before the 15th Assembly, taking into account the following considerations:
 - (a) When members of the gathering agree that there are insights they are ready and able to share, how their "report / story" might be sent to the whole Church in a format /manner that the members agree is most appropriate and helpful in telling the story: song, dance, video, variety of languages, images, art, written, etc;
 - (b) Include possible ways in which any insights / discernments of the activity and guidance of the Spirit / Word / Interests of God might be used to assist the UCA:
 - i. In establishing working and other groups whose membership involves people whose gifts and graces are marked by deep understanding of these insights;
 - ii. To further develop processes that will be conspicuously marked by respectful, empowering, and inclusive decision-making. Processes and people through whom God's grace is clearly at work bringing into being these signs of the realities of God's interests (One Body, many members: living faith and life cross-culturally);
 - iii. Explore other areas of concern noted by the Doctrine Working Group in its report to the work undertaken on a Theology of Marriage such as: the doctrines of Scripture, creation, new creation in Christ, along with Covenant theology and its expressions in communal and personal faith journeying, and to partnership as expressed through our relations with partner churches and other ecumenical bodies; and
4. authorise the President to invite all of the Councils, National Conferences and membership of the UCA to contribute gifts to provide for travel and other costs in making such a gathering possible, and to support any communities which may be offering hospitality / hosting; as an expression of inclusion and equality of opportunity, and as a way of recognising and accessing all the gifts of the whole people of God as matters of importance for the whole UCA in all its Councils, Conferences and gatherings.

d) Proposals from Christian Unity Working Group

1. Armenian Genocide

That the Assembly

1. acknowledge that the Armenian massacres and forced deportations of 1915-1923 constitute a Genocide;
2. commend the NSW and SA governments in acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and encourage the Federal and other state governments to do the same;
3. affirm the value of recognising a date on or near the anniversary of the Armenian genocide, as a day of observance and commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and request the National Consultant Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship to prepare
 - (a) a prayer to be provided for all congregations of the UCA for use on the day; and
 - (b) in consultation with others, educational and liturgical resources for congregations to use.

2. the church towards a common vision

That the Assembly

1. receive and celebrate the achievement of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission with the production of The Church – Towards A Common Vision;
2. commend it to all Councils of the Church for further study and reflection;
3. affirm the response document as presented at the Assembly;
4. (a) request the Christian Unity Working Group to incorporate the reflections arising from the Assembly into the next draft of the UCA's response; and
(b) authorize Standing Committee to approve the final response of the Church.

e) Proposal from National Historical Reference Committee

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee on the advice of the National Historical Reference Committee to disband the National Historical Reference Committee and facilitate the establishment of a network of UCA Archivists and a Uniting Church History Association.

f) Proposals for Defence Force Chaplaincy Committee

That the Assembly

encourage the Federal Government in its support of Australian Defence Force Chaplains through the provision of chapels, resources and facilities appropriate to the Chaplaincy.

g) Proposals from Synods

1. Withdrawal of Recognition – Regulation 2.10.3 (Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)

That the Assembly

authorise the Assembly Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend Regulation 2.10.3(b) in the following terms:

2. Regulations 5.1.3. - Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

That the Assembly

authorise the Assembly Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend Regulation 5.1.3 in the following terms.

BY WHOM EXERCISED

5.1.3 Discipline is to be exercised by the Church Council on behalf of the Congregation in the case of members, except in the case of allegations of sexual misconduct, and by the Presbytery and Synod in the case of Ministers.

5.1.3 Discipline is to be exercised by:

- a) The Church Council on behalf of the Congregation in the case of members, except in the case of allegations of sexual misconduct;
- b) The Presbytery when a Presbytery determines a Church Council has not adequately dealt with a discipline matter in relation to a member of the congregation;
- c) The Presbytery upon a request of a Church Council if the Church Council considers it is not able to deal with a concern due to a member's involvement in the congregation;
- d) The Presbytery and Synod in the case of Ministers.

2.10.3 The recognition of a Minister may be withdrawn by the Synod by reason of:

- (b) continuing in the designation of awaiting placement or not available for placement for more than two years unless the Placements Committee and the Presbytery both agree, by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting, that there are circumstances which warrant the extension of the term by a further year.

3. Co-options to synod standing committees - Synod of NSW/ACT

That the Assembly

authorise the Assembly Standing Committee on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee to amend Regulation 3.7.4.1 (a) (iv) to read:

SYNOD STANDING COMMITTEE (See Para 36, Constitution)

3.7.4.1 Membership

(a) The membership of the Synod Standing Committee shall consist of:

- (iv) no more than two persons 10% of its membership or five persons, whichever is the lesser, co-opted by the Standing Committee.

4. . Duties of Synod Secretaries 0 regulation 3.6.3.4. (Northern Synod)

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee, on advice from the Legal Reference Committee, to amend Regulation 3.6.3.4 (Duties of a Synod Secretary) to

- (a) bring it into line with the Duties of the General Secretary of the Assembly (Regulation 3.6.4.4); and
(b) not be inconsistent with the current Regulation 3.6.3.4.

h) Proposals from Presbyteries

1. Regulation 3.6.1 (d) - presbyteries of Port Philip East, Port Philip West and Geelong City Parish

that the Assembly

authorise the Assembly Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend Regulation 4.6.3 to read:

- 4.6.3 (1) Unless special circumstances with respect to any real property are declared to exist by Synod or its Standing Committee, no

real estate shall be acquired, sold, mortgaged or (except as provided in Regulation 4.6.2) leased, or any rights, easements or other estates or interests therein granted or created, assigned or surrendered, or contracts entered into in respect of such matters or in respect of the erection, enlargement, structural alteration, improvement or demolition of any substantial building or the borrowing of any money unless the same shall be approved by the relevant Church Council or other responsible body, the Presbytery and the Synod responsible for that property in the manner required by these Regulations.

(2) Before declaring that special circumstances relating to real property exist

the Synod or its Standing Committee shall give the relevant Congregation, Church Council, responsible body or Presbytery not less than 90 days notice in writing of the proposed declaration and an opportunity to make written submissions to the Synod or Standing Committee regarding the proposed declaration, such submissions to be provided to the Synod or Standing Committee not less than 10 days prior to the meeting to which the proposed declaration

2. Governance needs of the UCA in the 21st Century (Presbytery of the Illawarra

That the Assembly

1. direct the Standing Committee to establish a process which will enable a wide-ranging analysis of the fundamental governance needs of the Uniting Church in the 21st century;
2. (a) authorise the Standing Committee to establish the terms of reference for the review which shall include specific reference to the place of synods in the life of the Church; and
(b) request that recommendations, including but not limited to, the potential divestment, merger or dissolution of synods be brought to the 15th Assembly in 2018.

i) Proposals by individual members

1. Regulation 4.6.3. Allan Thompson and Geoffrey Grinton

That the Assembly

authorise the Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend the Regulations relating to Property Transactions and special circumstances (Regulation 4.6.3) to provide prescribed procedures to be followed to ensure that prior to making a Declaration of Special Circumstances it:

- gives disclosure of the reasons for the special circumstances;
- gives disclosure of other options to meet the circumstances which have been explored and abandoned;
- gives disclosure of the manner and extent to which property may be acquired, sold, mortgaged or in any other manner dealt with;
- consults fully with all bodies which may be affected by the declaration, taking cognizance of the purpose, functions, responsibilities and rights of those bodies as described in the Regulations;
- gives all affected Church Councils or other responsible bodies opportunity to respond in writing within a defined timeframe to the Synod or its Standing Committee, which has considered those submissions in its deliberations;
- ensures that natural justice is provided for all involved parties.