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e-news December 2009

Welcome to Community Connections.

To keep *Community Connections* of interest to the widest possible readership, we welcome for consideration news and information about initiatives, events and activities from all parts of the Synod. Regional contributions, and stories of how your congregation supports Living is Giving, are especially welcome. Send your material (maximum 150 words) to kima@nsw.uca.org.au.

Click [here](#) for Community Connections in a PDF that you can print off and distribute, or email to others in your congregation and community (requires Adobe Acrobat reader — click [here](#) to download).

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NEWS AND INITIATIVES

Message from the moderator

In the summer of 1957 a young doctor and his wife (heavy with child) took their family on a vacation from Greenock in Scotland across the water to an island called Jura, where nearly 1,500 years ago St Columba stopped on his journey, climbed one of the Paps of Jura, surely the one called the Sacred Mountain, from which, alas, he could see Ireland and so sailed on to found a monastery on another island called Iona in fulfilment of his vow to commence his missionary community out of sight of his beloved Ireland. [READ ON](#)

Rural God moments

A national gathering has heard that need for relationships and social contact for increasingly isolated rural families has to continue to be a ministry priority for the church. [READ ON](#)

General Secretary Recruitment

The Synod of New South Wales and the ACT is seeking a new General Secretary to commence from August 2010 due to the retirement of the Rev. Paul Swadling effective next July.

Applications are encouraged in writing to the Moderator, the Rev. Niall Reid (on behalf of the General Secretary Nominating Committee).

A full advertisement is now online at <http://news.nsw.uca.org.au/employment/> with the job description also available. Please mark correspondence with the title General Secretary – Application to kathyjam@nsw.uca.org.au or c/- the Secretariat, PO Box A2178, Sydney South NSW 1235.

Exterminate bunnies? Kill whales? Big questions for ethical children.

Just how ethical is it, in the mind of the average primary school student, to hunt elephants for their tusks? Students will wrestle with these and similar dilemmas as part of ethics classes to be offered as an alternative to special religious education studies in NSW.

As a consequence, the students will unwittingly encounter the higher thoughts of philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, whose works underpin the classroom exercise.

Ten state primary schools will begin a 10-week ethics class trial as an alternative for students whose parents choose not to let them attend scripture classes.

Each lesson revealed in the *Herald* today, focuses on an ethical topics such as the use and abuse of animals, bullying, care and compassion, friendship, graffiti and stealing. [READ ON](#)

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Camden Theological Library's new and improved website

Camden Theological Library has taken another step in providing a more widespread approach to theological resource sharing. A new look website (www.library.nsw.uca.org.au) was launched in October, the first of many exciting planned activities to take Library resources beyond the walls of the Centre for Ministry in North Parramatta. The new, interactive site is fully searchable, not only with direct access to the Library Catalogue, but with regularly updated feature books, reviews, up-to-the-minute news through a live Twitter feed and featured articles, event coverage and Library resource guides.

Also launched in October is e-Theo, a joint project between the School of Continuing Education, United Theological College and Camden Theological Library. e-Theo is a book review service that aims to provide support to people in ministry situations, highlighting useful texts for both enhancing ministry and nurturing personal spiritual life. e-Theo is written by people in ministry positions, for people in ministry positions. To experience e-Theo, follow the links through the Library website, or go to www.etheo.wordpress.com.

Don't forget the drought

The Moderator, the Rev. Niall Reid, has urged people not to forget about those who live with drought.

"I am grateful to those organisations and churches that continue to support the Uniting Church's Drought Appeal," he said.

"Whatever the future holds, as a church we will need to continue to find ways of providing support and a message of hope for those in recovery or in transition to a new way of life, as they face unwelcome realities, deal with uncertainty about the future, and grief for that which has passed.

"Please do not forget those who live with the effects of drought every day." See the [website](#).

Celebrate pre Synod

Take part in a special pre-Synod celebration on the evening of Friday April 9 at Ravenswood School. This promises to be a great time of celebration for all people associated with the Uniting Church in this Synod. Mark your diaries and visit the Synod 2010 website at <http://nsw.uca.org.au/synodmeeting/> in early February for more information about the program and how to get tickets.

"Generous ... as God is" is the theme of the meeting of the Synod of New South Wales and the ACT at Canterbury Park Race Course, April 10-13.

A pastor walks into a bar

No, this isn't a joke; it's a new scene for American Christianity: Young guys in their 20s and 30s forming Christian communities in pubs, concert halls, cafes and art galleries. In West Town, that guy is Mark Bergin, 29, who leads prayer meetings wearing a cap embroidered with the Guinness logo. The self-described "hot-dog-eating, baseball-loving, tool-owning missionary" is part of the church planting movement in the United States -- an effort to start thousands of churches a year that reach people in more culturally relevant ways. [READ ON](#)

Churches launch 2010 as year of work with migrants

Churches in Europe are launching 2010 as a year to strengthen their work with migrants, refugees and people belonging to ethnic minorities, and to lobby for their rights. "Migration has become a reality in almost all European countries, be they immigration, emigration, or transit migration countries," said Doris Peschke, general secretary of the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, which, with the Conference of European Churches, has initiated the "Year of European Churches Responding to Migration 2010". A website (www.migration2010.eu) sets out a calendar of dates for the migration year. These include the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on March 21, World Refugee Day on June 20 and International Migrants Day on December 18. [READ ON](#)

Ad campaign declares, 'No God? ... No Problem!'

Blogger Frank James for National Public Radio said "the so-called war on Christmas appears to be escalating this year" in the United States with the start of the Thanksgiving and Christmas season marked by a national advertising campaign based on the slogan, "No God? ... No Problem!" The campaign by the Washington-based American Humanist Association features a pictorial advertisement with several smiling people wearing Santa hats. Emblazoned on the advert is the slogan, which believers in non-theism say hinges on the axiom that people do not need God in order to be, and to do, good. The "No God" campaign is to be initiated in Washington DC on the city's public transport system, during the Thanksgiving weekend that starts on November 26. It will expand to the transit systems of Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco by December. [READ ON](#)

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Uniting Church members arrested at Parliament House

Four Uniting Church members were among 130 people who were arrested during a protest in Canberra on November 23. The group blockaded the entrance to Federal Parliament in a peaceful demonstration against the Government's inadequate action on climate change and refused to move until they were eventually forced to do so by the Australian Federal Police. The Uniting Church has

repeatedly called upon its members to advocate for policies that properly address climate change. Rex Graham, Dan Howe, Miriam Pepper and Richard Telfer were all strongly moved by their faith to participate in the civil disobedience action. It was the first time that they had been arrested. [READ ON](#) Federal Parliament's front doors were locked on Monday during a blockade by climate change protesters calling for deep cuts to carbon emissions. [MORE MORE](#)

National Church Life Survey to take place in 2011

All Australian churches are invited to take part in the fifth nationwide survey of churchgoers in 2011 – the National Church Life Survey. The NCLS Research team who will conduct the survey is an ecumenical body that aims to provide evidence-based results to help churches connect with the wider community. The survey will take place in a variety of forms across Australian churches in the second half of 2011, the same year as the National Census. National Director of NCLS Research, Dr Ruth Powell, is hoping to build on previous strengths of the National Church Life Survey, as well as introduce some innovations. "We're going to invite all churches in Christian denominations across Australia, and based on previous experience, we hope that 500,000 church attenders in 7,000 local churches from 25 denominations will participate in the survey," she said. [READ ON](#)

Advent prepares us to be grown-ups in faith

Why are we waiting? In *Insights* this month Andrew Irvine argues that Advent prepares us to be grown-ups in faith and, as Christmas arrives, prepares us for new life.

Rosemary Cottrell ponders the 12th century abbess Hildegard of Bingen's thought: What would it take to be "a feather on the breath of God"?

There's a DVD review of *Balibo* — the story of five Australian journalists killed in East Timor, a film the Indonesian government calls offensive.

There are also more book reviews this month to help you source stocking fillers or stock up wisely on summer reading. Longer reviews and more reviews can also be found at [website](#).

Apology a positive step forward says Uniting Church

The Uniting Church in Australia has welcomed the Federal Government's formal apology to the Forgotten Australians. President of the Uniting Church, the Rev. Alistair Macrae, said that the church had also acknowledged and apologised for its role in any harmful institutional care practices. [READ ON](#) It's a sorry state of affairs when forgiveness is not the main objective. [READ ON](#)

Help Target a brighter Christmas for vulnerable people

UnitingCare and Target are teaming together for the 18th UnitingCare Christmas Appeal and need your help to brighten the Christmas of a vulnerable person in your local community. You can make a difference simply by heading to your nearest Target or Target Country store from now until Wednesday December 23 and buying an extra gift for someone less fortunate. [READ ON](#)

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EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Walk against warming, December 12

President Obama is heading to the Copenhagen global climate summit, Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao will be there, and so will Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. This year's Walk Against Warming is happening at the most important moment ever for the planet. Occurring midway through the UN climate talks in Copenhagen it's your chance to be heard by world leaders. While they talk the talk, we're walking the walk all over the world — from New York to Tokyo, Mumbai to Paris and all over Australia . So get your walking shoes on and be part of the most important Walk Against Warming ever, and wear your sky blue "walking for the climate" shoelaces. On Saturday, December 12, the Sydney walk will start in Martin Place at 1 pm and end in the Botanic Gardens with music and food. There are regional walks

all across NSW, and walks in every state and territory. Find regional walks and more information at walkagainstawarming.org

Selmanovic to speak at Chapel by the Sea, December 13

Samir Selmanovic, director of a Christian community called Citylights and member of the Interfaith Relations Commission of the US National Council of Churches, will speak at Chapel by the Sea, Bondi, Sunday December 13, 12 noon - 2 pm. Samir Selmanovic is author of *It's Really All About God: Reflections of a Muslim Atheist Jewish Christian* and founder and co-leader of Faith House Manhattan, an interfaith "community of communities" that brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, atheists and others who seek to learn from the teachings, practices, sufferings and joys of people from different belief systems. For more information about the event or to RSVP, call 9130 3445. The Chapel is located at 95 Roscoe Street (corner Gould Street) Bondi Beach. Buses 380, 381 and 333 (prepay only) stop 50 metres from the Chapel. The cost will be \$10 and visitors have been invited to bring a plate to share. For more information please click [HERE](#)

Solar power for congregations presentation, December 16

We are all aware of the Uniting Church's desire to reduce our carbon footprint through reducing our electricity use and using renewable energy. This is an opportunity for your congregation to receive useful information to help you consider possible investment in solar powered energy generation. This information will be presented at a meeting of Uniting Church congregations which everyone is invited to attend. At the invitation of St Columba's Uniting Church in Braddon ACT, Pyramid Power will give a presentation on solar power opportunities for churches. There are many suppliers of solar energy systems but Pyramid Power is a company working with churches and community groups to demonstrate the opportunities for such groups to produce green power. The presentation will be given on Wednesday December 16, 7.00 pm at the Lewis Hall at St Columba's Uniting Church which is located at the corner of Fawkner and Farrer Streets in Braddon ACT. Please email Daryl Back, thebacks@grapevine.com.au, as soon as possible if you wish to attend. For more information on the company, visit the [website](#).

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Song-writing competition, February 26

"Songs that unite" is the title of the inaugural national song-writing competition of the Uniting Church in Australia. Song-writers are encouraged to write a piece of contemporary music for use in congregational singing in the following categories relating to aspects of a worship service: 1. Gathering the people; 2. Opening up to God; 3. Responding to God; 4. Sending. Please remember that **entries close on 26 February 2010**. The winners will be announced on March 31, 2010. There will be \$500 for the first prize and up to four \$150 highly commended prizes. The winning songs will be promoted across Australia. Further information about the competition, including conditions of entry, application forms and judging details, is available from the website www.assembly.uca.org.au.

World Day of Prayer, March 5

Something special happens on the first Friday of March each year. It is the World Day of Prayer, a Christian prayer movement from a women's perspective. The roots go back to the 19th century and since 1927 WDP has been celebrated in an ever increasing number of countries. On Friday March 5, 2010 more than three million people worldwide will be worshipping together during an annual day of prayer. Like a Mexican wave of prayer the first service will begin at sunrise in Tonga and move around the world until the sun sets in neighbouring Western Samoa. By then the Day will have been celebrated in over 170 countries and throughout Australia, over 1300 services will have been held. Each year the service is prepared by a different country. In 2010 the Christian women of Cameroon in Central Africa have chosen the theme "Let Everything That Has Breath Praise God". For information regarding holding a World Day of Prayer Service or the location of one near you go to the website www.worlddayofprayeraustralia.org.

LIVING IS GIVING: PRAYER POINTS AND RESOURCES

A big thank you!

Each year Living is Giving continues to advance the church's mission work in the areas of indigenous, cross-cultural, emerging and traditional ministries, theological education, school and tertiary ministry, community services, advocacy, and rural evangelism — areas which have changed many lives for the better.

Without your generous support, these sustaining and life-giving activities wouldn't have been possible. From all the communities, congregations, and families who have benefited from Living is Giving – a very Merry Christmas and big thank you!

Host your own Living is Giving presentation in 2010

Start your new year's resolution by challenging your congregation to be more active in discipleship and stewardship. Living is Giving provides you and your congregation with the opportunity to share the Christian message of hope and love with your community within and beyond the Uniting Church. To find out how you can become part of the bigger picture and learn how your congregation can make a difference to the lives of others, we invite you to host a free Living is Giving presentation. Our passionate presenters are happy to come to worship service and speak about their work or Living is Giving in general. This is a great way to connect with the mission focus areas you support. For more information please call Kimberly Almarza on 8267 4475, 8267 4475.

Think big – think 1 per cent ...

It doesn't seem like much – but 1 per cent can make a huge difference. If every Uniting Church congregation in New South Wales and the ACT contributed 1 per cent more of its total annual expenditure to Living is Giving, there could be up to \$600,000 more that goes into mission work.

That's an extra \$600,000 for mission initiatives in new housing areas, training people for ministry, bringing the gospel to schools and universities, supporting drought-affected rural communities and the day-to-day administrative and legal tasks that keep our congregations, faith communities and agencies running.

Unfortunately, contributions to Living is Giving have fallen, which means a leaner Synod budget and an uncertain situation for many of the church's ministries in the coming year. Many of these ministries offer people hope in hard times; providing shelter, care, sustenance or spiritual support where otherwise they may have none.

If you believe the mission work of the Uniting Church matters, make Living is Giving a priority in your congregation this financial year. Can your congregation or faith community commit to an extra 1 per cent per annum to help keep the many ministries of the New South Wales Synod strong and viable?

Please, think big by digging deep and continue to support these mission initiatives. We need to make Living is Giving a priority in the financial year ahead. Let's face the challenges ahead with renewed vigour and make a difference.

For more information please contact Kimberly Almarza on kima@nsw.uca.org.au or call 8267 4475. Make sure you visit the website for more information and resources on <http://livingisgiving.nsw.uca.org.au/>

Prayer points and praise points

Each year Living is Giving continues to advance the church's mission work in ways that have changed many lives for the better. The current year, 2009-10, already looks exciting, with new ventures and significant achievements. Contributions by congregations and individuals through Living is Giving have

helped make these activities possible.

Give thanks for:

- The Cross Cultural Youth Praise and Worship gathering, which saw an amazing turnout of around 400 young people and ministers from around 14 different backgrounds. No other event allowed our youth the opportunity to express how they connect with God as vibrantly as this gathering did.
- The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress was able to welcome its newest member, Resource Officer Hazel Leano, who will work with existing and growing UAICC ministries.
- The spiritual and economic regeneration of Tingha, a town once listed as the third most disadvantaged community in Australia.
- In the largest display of Christian unity, more than 1,500 churches from just about every Christian denomination, including 157 Uniting Church congregations, came together through the *Jesus. All About Life* media campaign; sharing Jesus with the rest of Australia.
- UnitingCare Ageing's plan to build 167 affordable dwellings under the National Rental Affordable Housing Scheme, many of which will be available to older Australians at risk of becoming homeless.

You can read more about these mission focus areas and other activities by clicking [here](#).

To find out more about Living is Giving visit: <http://livingisgiving.nsw.uca.org.au>.

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Studying journalism, graphic design or communications and would like to offer your skills to Insights? Go to <http://news.nsw.uca.org.au/employment/2009/graduates-students.htm> to learn how.

Don't forget about the [Moderator's Drought Appeal](#). Your donation will help provide counselling, chaplaincy services and emergency relief to drought-affected people.

CONTACT US: unitingcreative@nsw.uca.org.au

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