

GROWING UP UNITING

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Foreword

This collection of lively and thoughtful essays is instructive reading for anyone who cares about the present and future of the Uniting Church in Australia. The contributors write with candour about their experiences of “growing up Uniting.” The UCA’s contribution to their lives—its open and welcoming style, its encouragement of their questions and its capacity to respond with conversations that open up rather than close down further enquiry, its provision of loving and practical mentoring, its embrace of diversity and inclusiveness, its witness to radical gospel values of justice, compassion, servant leadership and rejection of oppression—is enthusiastically acknowledged. But they are not blind to their church’s shortcomings—its failure to always live up to the best impulses of the *Basis of Union*, its growing tendency to replace conciliar and consensus models of decision-making with corporate and managerialist ones, its loss of its early enthusiasm and imagination in the provision of youth ministries, its preference (sometimes and in some places), for hankering after old and past-it certainties rather than grasping the uncertainties of new challenges. These are the young people of our church, speaking to us all. We would do well to heed what they say, allow ourselves to be reproved by it, and let their insights and hopes temper our sometimes fearful predictions about the UCA’s future.

Dr Judith Raftery, *President of UCSA Historical Society*

Preface

After many years of teaching the history of the Uniting Church I have developed a deep admiration for those “young people” whose spiritual formation has more or less taken place within the Uniting Church. I have noticed that they have an uncommon maturity, confidence and depth of character. And, despite growing up at a time of serious institutional decline and having to contend with contentious debates within the Church over complex social issues, they have persevered in their faithfulness. On one memorable classroom occasion, I recall a student saying after discussing Andrew Dutney’s reflections in *Where did the joy come from?* (2001): “I didn’t experience the joy and exuberance of Church Union; that happened before I was born, for me it has been a time of constant struggle.” It was one of those lightbulb moments. For the first time I started to see the Uniting Church’s history through the eyes of people at least half my age. Needless to say, from that heartfelt outburst, the seeds of this book were sown. I wanted to understand better the religious experience of people who have grown up, persevered and matured within the Uniting Church. I wanted to hear what they had to say. I am convinced that they have much to teach us.

Not long afterwards, I invited my friend and sociologist Dr Elizabeth Watson to join me in a project that would explore the religious experience of people growing up in the Uniting Church. Elizabeth liked the idea and agreed to participate though we both had to delay the project because of other commitments and responsibilities until the beginning of 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic began to impact on Australia. In early March we started inviting people (aged between 18 and the mid-40s) to reflect on their experience of growing up within the Uniting Church. We tried hard to

find men and women (in roughly equal numbers) from all six Uniting Church synods who have a story to tell and were willing and able to tell it. We also tried to engage contributors who have different professional and work experience and, as far as practically possible, reflect the increasing cultural diversity of the Uniting Church.

The contributors to *Growing Up Uniting* were encouraged to be as honest and creative as possible. Most importantly we asked them to write from the heart, to be themselves. With an eye on what helpful knowledge might be gleaned from these reflections, we then offered some non-obligatory suggestions relating to their experience of Church as stimuli.¹ Most contributors took up these suggestions but not in a wooden or mechanical manner. Rather, many incorporated them into their reflections with literary flair and lightness of touch that are a joy to read.

We believe that *Growing Up Uniting* shines a light on important aspects of the Uniting Church's life that have rarely been examined before. The book captures thoughtful voices from the first generation to grow up in the Uniting Church. It contains insights that are fresh and authentic. *Growing Up Uniting*, we believe, is a testimony to the Church's ability to encourage its people to be courageous and honest and unafraid to be themselves.

¹ In the Letter of Invitation to contributors they were asked to consider some of the following in their essay: "the distinctive characteristics of the Uniting Church, especially its strengths and how they might be enhanced; discuss particular areas of the life and mission of the UCS that they see are weak, vulnerable or inadequate and how they arrive at these judgements; describe the various ways they have participated in church life and how rewarding or otherwise they have been; discuss their experience of community within the local church or more widely in the UCA; reflect upon the future of the Uniting Church and where they see the church heading and why; explain the factors that have kept them in the Uniting Church and those that would most tempt them to walk away from it; describe what is most important to their faith; consider the influences (people, events, etc) on their faith journey."

Contributors

Tim Bickerstaff grew up in a Uniting Church family in Sydney, before moving to Hobart in 2009. Although he is now less involved in the church than he once was, he has been both a participant and leader in various elements of the life of the church, such as youth groups, National Christian Youth Conferences (NCYCs), university ministry, music leadership, Elders Councils, Church Councils and worship teams. He is married to Mary and they have two daughters.

Craig Corby is a chartered accountant and a lifelong learner with qualifications in the diverse fields of project management, governance, business, and theology. Craig worked for over four years as the Chief Financial Officer of the Wayside Chapel in Sydney's Kings Cross. He is currently employed as Head of Church Engagement at Uniting NSW.ACT in Sydney, looking to build bridges between the denomination and the wider society in order to assist the Uniting Church become a strong missional church.

Andrew Corkill grew up in the Uniting Church and has spent over 15 years serving in both local congregations and synod roles in Sydney, Perth and Melbourne. He has also spent several years working with the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, based in New York City. Andrew is truly passionate about social justice and improving the lives of all people. He loves a challenge and finding creative ways for people to live out the gospel call. Currently, he is working with Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia which is responsible for the Christmas Bowl. He is also studying for ordained ministry.

Ben Cross is currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University. His main research interest

is political theory. He received his PhD from the University of Sydney in 2014. He is a member of Burwood Uniting Church in Sydney's inner west and a former member of Christian Students Uniting at Sydney University. He was a member of the Assembly Doctrine Working Group from 2015 until its eventual dissolution in 2018.

Katrina Davis is an aspiring writer from Sydney, New South Wales. Her professional life focuses on advocacy for people with lived experience of mental health issues, an experience she shares. Katrina loves chocolate and the arts and her family. She owns more clothes than is sensible but is only in possession of a solitary saucepan. There is nothing insensible about her large collection of books and friends.

Glenda Downie grew up in the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury and moved to the Northern Beaches in 2005 for her father's work with Uniting Conference Centres. Glenda completed a Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Health from Western Sydney University and worked as an environmental health officer for local government for seven years. Glenda is currently engaged in children's ministry at Pittwater Uniting Church where she and her husband Brett are members. Glenda is passionate about ministering to young people and enjoys walking, skiing and travelling.

Elizabeth (Ellie) Elia is the Minister at Glenbrook Uniting Church in New South Wales. She studied acting at the Victorian College of the Arts before entering the Ministry. In 2014 she co-founded Uniting Women, the first Uniting Church women's conference in over two decades when 500 women from across Australia gathered together to share their stories. Ellie is passionate about storytelling and is committed to nurturing the church to be a truly intergenerational, hospitable, generous community that makes a real difference in the world. Ellie lives in the Blue Mountains with

her husband Andrew, their children Joshua and Micah and their beloved chickens Moana and Jeff (the gender-fluid chicken) and their dog Ezra.

William W. Emilsen is an historian who is an adjunct associate professor at Charles Sturt University and was, until his retirement in 2014, Lecturer in Church History and World Religions at United Theological College in Sydney. He has recently written a biography of the Indigenous leader Charles Harris called *Charles Harris: A Struggle for Justice* (MediaCom, 2019) and co-edited *Sacred Ways and Places in the Blue Mountains* (BMERT, 2021). He has had a long-term interest in Aboriginal history, the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi and the history of the Uniting Church in Australia. He lives in Leura in the Blue Mountains with his wife Carolyn.

Justine Ganwanyawany was born in 1984 and is currently working as an assistant teacher in Ramingining community school. She has a 16-year-old daughter named Vashti. Justine comes from a strong Christian family and has studied media studies and theology at Nungalinga College where she is currently doing a Diploma in Translation Studies.

Andrew Goodwin likes mango smoothies and making his children laugh. Unfortunately, he spends most of his time making graphs for the New South Wales State Government and doing the laundry, which are both important. His current life goals are to smoke a trout, build a mudbrick house, run for political office and see a human colony on Mars. He's been a member of seven Uniting Churches but still does not have a name badge.

Madeline (Maddy) Gordon turned 19 in April this year, and while she is currently unsure of her passion or direction, she is studying a Bachelor of Law/Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy and Economics at the University of Wollongong. Maddy has grown up in an

increasingly large family which includes seven nieces and nephews, so there is always something going on at home. She has a one-year-old Labrador called Viola whom she loves very much but can be a real handful! Life is busy, stressful and exciting in equal measure.

Emma Halgren grew up in Sydney and has been involved in the Uniting Church in various ways ever since she was young. She is a writer and editor and has worked in a number of church organisations, including the Uniting Church's NSW ACT Synod and the Geneva-based World Council of Churches, where she was a youth intern in 2009. She has studied politics, journalism and theology. Emma is now living in Melbourne with Matt and their little boy Charlie. She loves being part of the Sophia's Spring Uniting Church community, which meets in the beautiful grounds of the CERES Community Environment Park. Along with spending time with her family and friends, the things that make her happiest are diving into a new recipe, a new novel or a new swimming spot.

Michelle Harris spent much of her childhood in the Northern Territory. She has completed tertiary studies in education and theology. She has also lived in Adelaide, Melbourne, Thailand and the United Kingdom. Michelle has had a varied career, including working for the Uniting Church. A highlight was spending three years as a resident staff member of the Iona Community in Scotland. Michelle is married, likes travelling, visiting family and friends, believes in the value of community and appreciates God's amazing world.

Elvina Kioa Kramer is of Tongan heritage. Elvina studied mechanical engineering at Monash University and worked for Umow Lai Eniginuity for eight years and is currently Principal Mechanical Engineer at AECOM in Melbourne where she has been for seven years. She is married to John Kramer and they have three children: Elijah (4), Talitha (2) and newly born Kesish.

Trevor Prowse was born in Melbourne, raised in Sydney and now lives in the Blue Mountains. Trevor has been a member of the Uniting Church since Union. He holds TAFE and university qualifications in horticulture, environmental science and bush regeneration. Trevor has worked at local council level and National Parks before starting his own bush regeneration and garden design and maintenance business. He is a father, husband and owner of two dogs.

Roslyn Richardson spent her early years in Taree and Wagga Wagga in regional New South Wales before moving to Sydney in 1983 where she was part of Northmead Uniting Church until her mid-20s. She currently lives in Roseville, with husband Stuart and two children, Liam and Jacob. Her family is part of the Willoughby and Northbridge Uniting Church congregation. She studied media and public relations and is a freelance writer and editor.

Peter Son is of Korean heritage. He finished the Higher School Certificate at North Sydney Boys High School in 2006. He has a Bachelor of International Studies and Law from the University of Sydney, majoring in government and international relations and a Master of Public Policy also from Sydney University. Peter is a public Policy officer in the New South Wales Government and is the Founding Director of S2P Connect Pty Ltd, a “high school tutoring agency with a twist.” Peter is a member of the Killara Uniting Church in Sydney.

Richard Telfer lives in Darwin, NT. He is the Deputy Chairperson of the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia, pastor at Palmerston Uniting Church and chaplain to Somerville Community Services. He completed his Formation for ministry in 2020, holding degrees in theology and ministry. In his spare time, Richard tinkers with broken Land Rovers and goes on long bush walks.

Elizabeth A. Watson is a retired academic sociologist. She taught for many years at Western Sydney University. She has a particular interest in the teaching of research methods, methodology, epistemology and ethics. Elizabeth's research over recent decades has focused on care and caring work but has also included research on children's wellbeing, kinship care and women's human rights. She is a member of Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney and served on the Council of United Theological College for several years until its dissolution.

Liana Whitten has been a part of the Uniting Church her whole life. She has led worship, been a key leader in her local congregation, participated in Presbytery and its Pastoral Relations Committee and served as a member of the Synod Selection Panel for many years. In her non-church life Liana is a lawyer and believes that her work is also part of her ministry—bringing the light of Christ into some dark places. She and her husband, Gavin, have three beautiful children and it is her great joy to see faith expressed through their lens and leadership, together with their questions and challenges.

Sarah Williamson (née Trengove) is a deacon in placement as a spiritual care chaplain at Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide, and in shared ministry at Christ Church, Wayville. She is married to Dave (Minister of the Word) and together they have two boys. Sarah grew up in the mid-north of South Australia, trained at United Theological College in Sydney, and she and Dave have served in placements in Kingscliff, Wollongong (NSW) and Bright (Vic) before moving to South Australia where they remain. Sarah has developed a love of birding so in her spare moments you'll find her in the Adelaide bush somewhere with a camera, surrounded by birds.

Introduction

The remarkable reflections in *Growing Up Uniting* contain affectionate memories, mature insights and challenging critique born of the writers' unique experience of growing up in the Uniting Church. This collection records the religious experience of 20 Uniting Church men and women from across Australia whose ages range from their late teens to their mid-40s. They represent the first two generations of the Uniting Church who were born into and grew up in the Uniting Church. The Uniting Church is their spiritual home. They have been Uniting from their birth and, for the most part, Uniting for their whole life. Madeline Gordon jokes that she was involved in "the Uniting Church before [she] was born!" Ellie Elia lyrically imagines the Uniting Church "loving her into being." For all of the contributors to this book, the Uniting Church, in Roslyn Richardson's words, is "like water is to a fish." Andrew Corkill elaborates on this imagery in "A Young Fish Discovers Water." After an awkward exchange with a dyed-in-the-wool Methodist, Andrew explains, "I didn't think of my church as anything else but Uniting ... Uniting was my denomination, and it was all that I knew."

Only in their teens, or perhaps a little later, did the contributors to this volume come to appreciate that there were markers of the Uniting Church that distinguish it from other churches. Probably the most visible for young girls is women in leadership. Emma Halgren, for example, observes that when she was a child it was completely normal to have a female minister and she didn't realise until much later that it was such a "big deal" in other traditions. As a young teenager, Ellie Elia fondly remembers her minister who wore "colourful dangly earrings" and "spoke of God like a woman." Ellie comments, "I will be forever grateful to have grown up in a church where gender was not a stumbling block to imagining myself in ministry."

The Uniting Church's adoption of an "open table" is another marker of difference that young Uniting people soon discovered, sometimes surprisingly so. In primary school Michelle Harris first became aware that the Uniting Church was different from other churches when she learned that her friends in the Catholic Church were not allowed to take Holy Communion before their confirmation. "But as a child in the Uniting Church," Michelle recalls, "I was able to receive the bread and juice—they were the gifts of God for all. Communion united us, young and old, children and adults, as the people of God." Glenda Downie also remembers that it was only when she had been invited to an Anglican youth group that she became aware of how different the Uniting Church is. Glenda had grown up in Uniting Church congregations where children were taught about, and encouraged to participate in, Holy Communion. When she was 14 and was refused Communion in the Anglican Church because she wasn't confirmed, Glenda was deeply hurt. "I realised just how much this meant to me," she says, "and I was angry that someone would stop me coming to the Lord's Table."

As children in the Uniting Church grow up and go into work or on to further studies, they discover other differences about the Uniting Church that are less visible though no less important than women in leadership or children being allowed to take Communion. At university Roslyn Richardson discovered to her surprise "that other churches upheld practices and rules that could exclude those who were 'other' when [she] understood God's love and grace was for everyone." For Andrew Corkill, it was after travelling overseas and working in a United Methodist Church in New York that he came to fully appreciate some of the distinguishing characteristics of the Uniting Church. During that time, Andrew noticed himself feeling that he missed the Australian accent of the Uniting Church's liturgy, the Uniting Church's embrace of different cultures and language, and most of all he "missed the missional understanding of the Uniting Church."

Despite the contributors' awareness of the Uniting Church's various shortcomings and tensions, their affection for the Uniting Church is palpable. First of all, their deep gratitude to the Uniting Church is most noticeable. The Uniting Church, writes Elvina Kioa Kramer, gave her the "freedom to explore" the spiritual life, "freedom to question, learn and choose God's gift of grace." Others such as Andrew Goodwin are thankful that it was in the Uniting Church where he first heard the "call of radical discipleship." Tim Bickerstaff said he gained "a deep appreciation of the importance of community as the place where Christian faith is expressed." Similarly, Liana Whitten values the Uniting Church as a place where "belonging" matters more than "believing," and "relationship" more than "religiosity." Nearly all the contributors testify to the warm and welcoming nature of the Uniting Church. Even after her "diversion" into "middle-aged atheism," Katrina Davis thanks the Uniting Church for extending to her a welcoming and helping hand. Elvina draws on the biblical story of the prodigal son to express her gratitude: "I feel I will always be welcomed into the church regardless of the length of time I have been inactive, the size or type of the contribution I make to church life or whether I have accepted Christ into my life." With these testimonies to the welcoming atmosphere experienced in Uniting congregations, it does not come as a surprise that the beautiful hymn "Come As You Are" written by the Australian Loretto sister, Deirdre Browne, is referenced by Glenda Downie. That hymn has almost anthem status in the Uniting Church.

Come as you are: that's how I want you.

Come as you are; feel quite at home,

Close to my heart, loved and forgiven.

Come as you are; why stand alone?

The contributors' affection for the Uniting Church is also manifest in their expressions of pride for what the Church stands for. Craig Corby writes, "I am a proud member of the Uniting Church—an organisation that is meant to be a movement first and an institution second." Liana Whitten also confesses that for most of the time, she, too, is a "proud child" of the Uniting Church. "I fundamentally believe that there is no other church or faith community offering what we have the capacity to offer." Sarah Williamson hopes that her children will have the same opportunities she has had in the Uniting Church: "I ... am immensely proud to be a part of this community we call the Uniting Church and I am immensely proud seeing my children growing up engaging and caring for the things that I was nurtured and formed in also." As a recently ordained minister, Richard Telfer expresses the view that the Uniting Church people "should be proud of who we are, a church that is committed to walking into the future."

Sometimes affection for the Uniting Church flows over into heartfelt expressions of love. "I love the Uniting Church in Australia" testifies Peter Son, because a "uniting" Church has the capacity to transcend cultural differences without displacing Christ from the centre of its worship. While Peter's attention is focussed on the distinctive name of the Uniting Church and its potential to witness to God's inclusivity, Liana Whitten expresses her clear-sighted devotion to the Uniting Church for the way it encourages the development of every person's "authentic self," the conciliar nature of the Uniting Church and its consensus decision-making that "goes beyond democracy," and the value placed on covenanting with First Nations people and the Church's courage to speak out publicly on contemporary social and political issues.

Undoubtedly, the most invaluable contribution of this book lies in the insights the authors offer in terms of the factors that contributed to their formation in the Uniting Church. Some of

these have already been alluded to, such as the freedom to explore, opportunities for service, experiences of community, awareness of the wider church, and the challenge of radical discipleship. Yet, the one factor that stands out about everything else is mentoring. The mentoring of young people is without question the most important insight to emerge from the reflections in the book. Mentoring is rightly recognised by Liana Whitten as the “consistent component” in the formation of church leaders. Glenda Downie pays tribute to Tom and Jean Grunsell who mentored her as part of a local church’s “adopt a grandparent” program. Justine Ganwanygawany emphasises the importance of mentors by first listing the four people who have had the strongest Christian influence on her life. Both Madeline Gordon and Sarah Williamson acknowledge their mothers as their mentor. Other contributors mention ministers, Sunday School teachers, youth workers, lay people, and grandparents as mentors. Ben Cross expresses his gratitude to the Rev. John Hirt, Uniting Church chaplain at the University of Sydney, who mentored him. The “lesson” for the Uniting Church to take from these experiences of mentoring is obvious according to Ben: “Spend intentional time on the *formation* of young people.” Ben pleads with the Church to spend time with young people, time to “[h]ave conversations with them about how they understand scripture, how they understand the world and what they think is really going on; how church community is formed and sustained, and how to relate to others in healthy and constructive ways.”

Mentoring for tertiary students is generally acknowledged as having been well resourced by the Uniting Church by appointing chaplains and supporting organisations like Christian Students Uniting (CSU) and Uniting Church of Australia Tertiary Students Association (UCATSA), but Ben Cross discerns two groups of young people who have been overlooked. The first is school-age children between the ages of 12 and 18 and the second is young adults who don’t attend university. Glenda Downie finds herself

frustrated by this lack of commitment to children's ministry and, in recent time, it has caused her to question her "loyalty to the Church." Ben proposes a solution that entails mentoring of everyone in the Uniting Church between the ages of 12 and 25, but he is equally frustrated: "If the UCA is collectively either incapable or unwilling to help form young people for Christian discipleship, we might plausibly ask whether it is a good thing for it to continue to exist."

The sting in Glenda and Ben's comments makes it abundantly clear that it would be a mistake for the reader to think that the profusions of affection expressed above might mean that the contributors to this volume have lost their ability to critique. Far from it. Top of their list of concerns and criticisms is the declining levels of commitment and support from synods and presbyteries for young people's ministry. Elvina Kioa Kramer captures the general tone: "I believe this is the biggest challenge the UCA is facing today. That is, to encourage and support the growth of the Christian faith of youth and young adults in the church." Glenda Downie fears that the Uniting Church is in danger of being side tracked by too many "justice issues" at the expense of forming children and young people in the Christian faith. Glenda yearns for the Uniting Church to "invest in children and young people in the same way that people invested in me all through my childhood and teenage years." In Trevor Prowse's experience, the 1990s was the last time he saw a flourishing of youth in the Uniting Church. Andrew Goodwin attributes this decline in part to the disappearance of Presbytery Easter Camps for young people: "That it is highly unlikely my sons will ever attend a Uniting Church camp for young people causes me great sadness. With waning leadership and resourcing, I cannot see a future where they will be afforded these holy places."

Probably second on the list of grievances is the manner in which some of the changes to Church's polity no longer enshrine the

original ecumenical vision of the *Basis of Union*. For example, Michelle Harris expresses the view that the removal of parishes in the Church has been a “double-edged sword.” Their removal may have reduced the level of governance but it also had the unintended consequence of weakening community and awareness of the wider church. “Churches were built so that people could walk to them. People went to local churches. You saw each other down the street, and congregations within a parish would do things together, and build those relationships, build community. We have lost a set of meetings ... but we have also lost the community.”

The move from geographical to non-geographical presbyteries in some synods comes in for similar criticism. Sarah Williamson shares a widely held concern, particularly in the South Australian Synod, that non-geographical presbyteries weaken relationships and respectful decision-making. The Uniting Church, Sarah powerfully argues, is a “people on the way,” yes, always ready to change but also, always needing to work together to discern the future. Foundational to the latter, Sarah believes, are strong, working and loving relationships. She challenges the very premise on which non-geographical presbyteries are based because, she believes, they undermine the Uniting Church’s ecumenical vision of unity in diversity and create a chasm between those who think differently. For Sarah, “what was lost was the ability—and in fact, the imperative—to mix with other churches, colleagues and communities that were not of a similar mind to each other.”

There is also criticism of the growing corporatisation within the Uniting Church. Trevor Prowse sees this development as partly responsible for the Church losing its way with “middle Australia.” The more the Church takes on the trappings of a corporate entity, Trevor argues, the less likely it is able to engage with and serve local communities. For Peter Son, there is an ever-present danger with creeping corporatisation in the Church: an “ironic

discrepancy between what we say and how we act,” an obsession with image, the need “to protect the label of the Church” at all costs, and a drifting away from being a “Christ-centred” church. Liana Whitten admits that she would dearly love to see the Church “torn apart and stripped back to ‘early church’ non-bureaucratic, non-corporate models and rebuilt from the ground up.” But alas, she admits, that would have unintended consequences. Liana is a realist. She insists that the Uniting Church must “live in a world that will no longer accept a church with anything less than strict regulation for the protection of the vulnerable. If we are to be an organised, institutional church at all [not simply a movement], then we will continue to require regulation, policies, procedures and processes that support government regulation and oversight.”

Running in tandem with concerns about the corporatisation of the Church, there are questions raised about slippage into hierarchical forms of leadership. Too often, it appears to the contributors to this volume that corporate models of decision-making take precedence over those made by Church’s councils. Sarah Williamson relates her experience of people abusing their authority and employing various forms of trickery to undermine consensus decision-making: “I have seen many too afraid to speak in a room or even vote for fear of backlash. I have seen the way that fear can drive people to stack meetings and numbers and prepare themselves for battle, rather than trusting in the incredible movement of the Spirit that can and does happen throughout our decision processes.”

As with most mainline Churches in Australia over the past 40 years or more, the Uniting Church has declined in numbers and influence, but the overwhelming and not uncritical conviction of the writers in this collection, contrary to gloomy projections of the Church’s demise from within and without, is that God still has a future for the Uniting Church. “For all its faults,” writes Tim Bickerstaff, “the Uniting Church remains a highly valuable,

and remarkable, community of God's people ... I am glad to have been part of the life of the church up to now, and look forward to what the future may bring." In a similar vein, Craig Corby writes, "I honestly believe the best years of the Uniting Church are in front of us and not behind." Gavin Whitten also expresses the confident hope that there are "much better days ahead" for the Uniting Church if it remains faithful to the original vision behind its formation. All the authors seek a better Church, a more faithful Church, a more responsive Church where young people can grow and flourish. They are all thankful for growing up in the Uniting Church and trust that the Church will listen to their experience so that future generations of young people will flourish likewise. As Liana Whitten astutely observes:

For us to have future that is vital and life-giving, we need to embrace our identity as a place of welcome and relationship. We need to continually seek forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption where we have stepped awry. We need to always seek to listen, learn, love, laugh and leap in faith—probably in that order. This is the kind of UCA I believed I grew up in and it is the kind of UCA I want my children to embrace. It is the kind of UCA that the world actually needs.