Ruminations

Spring Summer 2026

Journey



Contributors

Pastor Robert Riley; Wellington UAICC Ministry Centre is a proud Wayilwan and Wiradjuri man, who grew up in between Warren and Dubbo N.S.W. He did not grow up in a Christian home, it was far from it. Robert found Christ and began his walk with him much later on in life, through his beautiful wife and her family. But hindsight is a beautiful thing, because even though he did not know the lord, He knew him, and was always there throughout his whole life, walking and guiding him with every step to become the man he is today. A man of God, A family man, with a beautiful wife and four beautiful children.

Rev. Hee Won Chang is a Minister of the Word in the UCA, currently in placement at Hope Uniting Church. Hee Won will join the Saltbush Ministry team in 2027.

Rev. Punam Bent is a Minister of the Word in the UCA, and Associate Secretary of the Synod of NSW & ACT. Punam has worked in the Church as an Ordained Minister of the Word for 34 years, (three in the United Methodist Church (USA), and the rest in the UCA). Punam has a passion for a pastorally enriching ministry, that encompasses all spaces of our Church.

Merilyn Mosher: Having been born in country Victoria, my love for the country has never left me and I now find myself in the Rylstone area of the beautiful Central Tablelands as a retired alpaca farmer. My journey here has seen many twists and turns but along that journey were many church communities that gave unconditional support and love.

Danina & Rev. Tim Jensen: Ms. Danina Jensen is a Registered Nurse: Midwife, mother and wife to Rev. Tim Jensen will begin a placement in Darwin at Nightcliff UCA.

Rev. Dr Ockert Myer is a Uniting Church Minister and academic lecturer. Ockert is 'retired', but continues to lecture at United Theological College without administration responsibilities which we appreciate gives a bit of a taste of retirement!

What's in this issue of Ruminations?

Editor's Introduction: Journey 2
Reflections on Ministry & Country 4
Reader's Letters, Experiences & Photo's 6
A Journey North 8
Saltbush and United Theological Student's Rural Field Trip 12
Journey 14
On a journey: the Church as a Pilgrim People 16
Safar Nama 20
Age is the getting of wisdom 24
Saltbush Update 27



Editor's Introduction: Journey

Rev. Natasha He | Scattered Communities Minister

Mālō e lelei (Greetings)

Growing up in Sydney's Northern Beaches, I never thought that one day I would live in Dubbo. From the coastline to the country and from the ocean to the river. It has been a time of learning, growing and discovering a different sense of community and belonging.



Moving to Dubbo meant leaving behind the familiar: the place where I was born and raised, the people I knew and loved, and the comfort of being somewhere that had always been home. Now I won't pretend that the transition was easy. There have been challenges and times when I have missed what I left behind. But I have also found wonderful friendships, unexpected encounters, and people who have welcomed my family and I with genuine kindness and generosity. Sometimes we discover the most about ourselves when we find ourselves in unfamiliar places.

But my journey did not begin with me.

I often think of my late maternal grandmother, who left Tonga to begin a new life in Australia. I can only imagine the courage it took to leave everything familiar, with hopes for a better future for her children and family. Her sacrifice and resilience created

opportunities for those who would come after her. As her granddaughter and now a mother, I recognise that my children and I are beneficiaries of the journey she began. The chances taken by one generation can shape the lives of generations to come.

When I reflect on these experiences, I think about the many journeys we encounter throughout Scripture. Again and again, we meet people who are called to leave familiar places, face uncertainty, trust God and discover something new about themselves and their faith. These stories do not promise that the road will always be easy. They speak of a God who remains present through change, hardship and new beginnings.



A big mālō aupito (thank you very much) to everyone who has contributed to this edition. Your stories bring the theme of Journey to life, showing us that even though our circumstances are different, we share experiences of change, hope, struggle, belonging and growth.



From Dee Why Beach to the Wambuul River, home is not just about the place that you are in. It is found in the relationships we nurture, the people who welcome us and the communities where we experience care and belonging.

'Ofa moe melino (love and peace),

Natasha

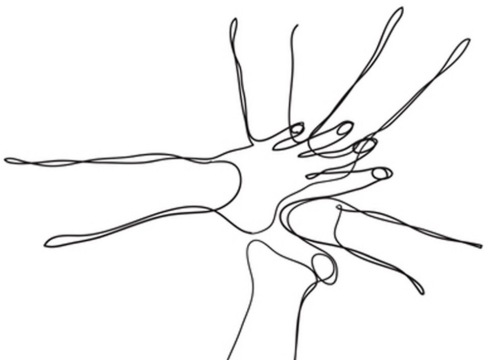


Reflections on Ministry & Country

Pastor Rob Riley | Wellington UAICC Ministry Centre

Yaama – Hello

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, of this beautiful country on which we all work, play, worship and live. May we celebrate the vast cultures and stories, the connections to country and spirituality. We honour the connections and knowledge that have been passed down since the beginning. May we pay our respects to the elders past, present and emerging. I pray that they share the knowledge they receive with the same respect that was shared with them. May they guide their communities with wisdom and strength.



As Christians we give thanks to God, the creator of all things. Everything that we know, and love comes from him, our past, our present, our future, he put the ancestors here in this land and blessed them with the knowledge to look after it. Let us give thanks to our lord for the culture and spiritual connection our people hold with this land. Let us acknowledge the



history of the people, the stories, the knowledge and contributions made by first nations people and let us recognise truth, justice, acceptance and reconciliation moving forward.

May we all walk together as brothers and sisters in Christ's love and spirit, showing love and respect for each other, caring for our country and building a future together that is grounded in Christ's compassion, understanding and hope.

Yiradhu marang – may the day be good to you all.

God bless



Reader's Letters - Experiences - Photos

We'd like to hear from you!

Send in a story of up to 200 words, or photo with caption to: saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au*.

This can either be on the Rumination theme's for 2026 which are Climate, Mystery and Journey or on the topic of your choice.

*We will endeavour to include as many stories as possible, but cannot guarantee all submissions will be published.















A Journey North

Rev. Tim Jensen & Danina Jensen

Irene was from Yorkshire, England, and moved to Longreach in her early 70's to be closer to her only child who was working as a vet. When asked about how it felt to move to the other side of the world, Irene said, "It was as if I had died." She was very much involved and loved by the Longreach community, but no-one knew her before the 70's, her history rests in another country. She often said there is the Yorkshire Irene and the Longreach Irene.



We are ready to begin a journey back north to Darwin. As we have moved to very different locations, Irene's words speak into our own experiences of moving. It does feel like a part of us has died when we move to a different place where we are unknown. Dying in that part of you that had a place in another community where you were known and felt that comforting sense of belonging. In this new place, you are unknown, new relationships begin, boundaries are tested, trust grows gradually and you reclaim some of that sense of being seen of being known, but you are not the same person.

We often joke about the different kind of people we are to the people we were. They are almost strangers to us, so much has changed. We are sure you have all experiences something of the change in your own lives as you have journeyed your faith. Hopefully you are different to the person you were forty or even ten years ago. Our faith journeys are about change, transformation, renewal and this is not easy but central to growing in knowing God, others and self.

As we journey, we contemplate Jesus travelling the backroads around Galilee as he journeys to Jerusalem. The one story that sits with us, is Jesus calming the storm. Jesus invites his disciples to travel across the lake, a storm whips up, the disciples are in fear for their lives, Jesus then calms the storm and rebukes them. It is strange for such hardy fisherfolk to be so scared of a storm. Their fear may be more about the destination and the uncertainty of what may lay ahead. They were heading into unknown territory, to a group of people who were unfamiliar to their own. Yet Jesus calls them to travel with him, to get into the boat. To encounter the different, the challenging, to walk alongside others and share your lives with them. To be expression of God's love and compassion. When you feel overwhelmed with the crashing waves, the challenging circumstances, Jesus is in the boat, reminding us of his calm and assuring presence. This will change you, it will go deeply into your personhood, the core of your being, that part of you that often lays hidden but known to God.

As we prepare for our journey, we are packing up a house, so much that has been hidden is revealed. Sorting through what needs to be kept, given to the op-shop or taken to the tip is burdensome. Sifting through photo's, kids' toys (now adults) and other memorabilia can be emotional, it can also make you a bit ruthless, questioning why on earth did we keep the misshaped pottery platypus. Maybe we thought the child who made it would want to keep it, yet we are given strange looks from them when we suggest they reclaim ownership. The sorting through 'stuff' draws us to more words of Jesus (Matthew 6:19-21)

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."



There is not a lot of stuff that we feel we need to keep. The treasure of heaven, the love that we carry with us, the memories we have and knowing the God of life is our sojourner are our essentials. Really the only things we find 'essential' are the photographs. Everything else just helps us along the way, like a good pair of sandals and sturdy staff. Anyway, much of what we had stored away has already been eaten by cockroaches or rats.

After all the sorting, packing and farewells we leave with a deep sense of gratitude. We are grateful for the friendships we have made and those we have had for years. We are grateful for the opportunities of working in nursing (Danina) screening four year old's eyes and vaccinating teenagers at a clinic and we are grateful for Saltbush.

In many ways Saltbush is on a journey. Our foundational Gospel passage of Luke 10 is all about how, where and why the 72 went amongst the villages on their journeys of proclaiming the nearness of God. Lives were changed as they met, broke bread and healed the villagers. The disciples' lives were also changed as they encountered the movement of God in their own lives. The Saltbush team has always been journeying with the scattered communities exploring life and faith together and new ways of being Christian community.

I (Tim) am deeply grateful for those I have journeyed with along the way. With my colleagues and with those lay leaders and members of the scattered Christian communities who bear faithful witness to the nearness of God. In particular, I am grateful for Rev. Mark and Rev. Natasha for their wisdom, insight, passion and friendship.

Bless you all, as you journey. May you know the God of journey, the Christ in the boat and the Spirit who walks alongside.

Tim Daina.



Saltbush and United Theological Student's Rural Field Trip - 2026!

Each two years the UTC Candidates for Ministry spend a week out west with the Saltbush team; visiting smaller rural congregations, small business and large farms, walking on country and exploring the breadth of the Church as the body of Christ. During the week of 17th. – 22nd. November, we held our field trip in Dubbo, Narromine, Nyngan & Wellington. As part of this time together we also held a Saltbush Gathering and the Service of Closure for Rev. Tim Jensen as he moves on to a congregation in Darwin, NT.



The Saltbush team are thankful to Rev. Dr Seforosa Carrol, Rev. Nicole Fleming and Rev. Dr Michael Earl, for being with us for the field trip, and the ongoing support of UTC, including Camden Theological Library. We're thankful to Dubbo Uniting Church for welcoming us and of course, we're thankful to the students for their warmth and enthusiasm.






UNITING ABORIGINAL
& ISLANDER
CHRISTIAN CONGRESS










Sensei Benny Urquidez
Speaks about Bruce Lee
1964 Long Beach International
Karate Championships



Journey

Rev. Hee Won Chang | Hope Uniting Church

"A journey is not a matter of departing, it's walking toward a visit," writes the Korean poet Park, Nohae in his book, *Reading While Walking Along*. Walking towards envisions looking forward, perhaps with curiosity and excitement but maybe there is also vulnerability and uncertainty. Will I be welcomed? What will wait for me? How long will the journey take? Who will I meet along the way? Who are my companions on the journey?

Within the English word journey contains root for a single day. This word comes from the Old French *journée*, a day's work or a day's travel, and before that from the Latin *dies*, day. From one sunrise to the next, that in between was what was thought of a journey. The Korean word, meaning journey is 여정yeojeong. This word is made up of a traveller or a wanderer who is on a way to somewhere. A guest on a road is what ancient Koreans imagined as a journey.



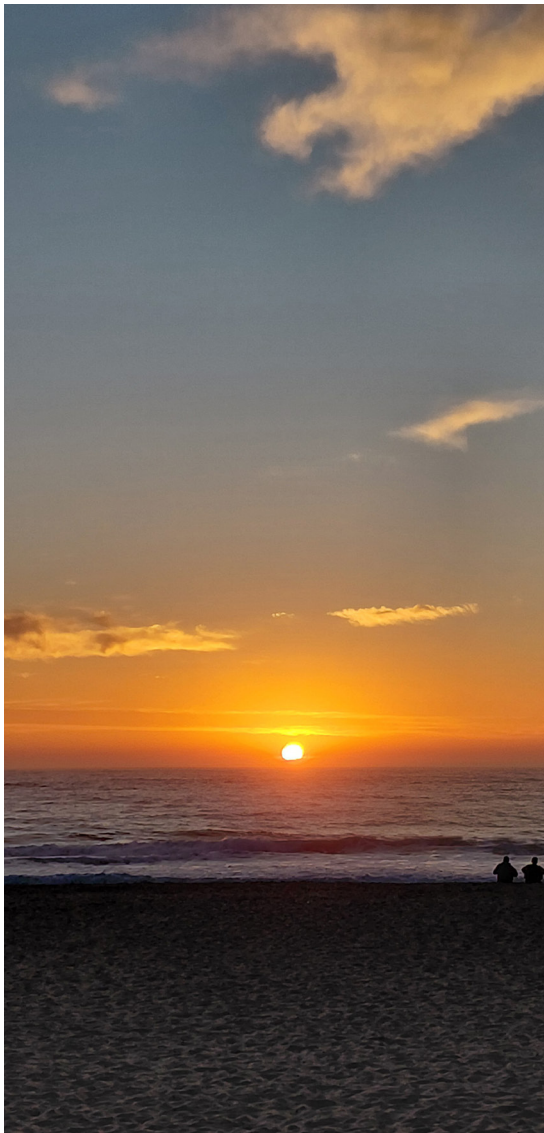
As I write this piece, the placement I belong to at the moment is going through a preaching series on the Acts of Apostles with a theme "Cultivating and Letting Go." Acts is essentially a book of in between-ness. The disciples are in between the ascension and fulfilment, old identities and new creation, between Jerusalem and the ends of the earth. It is a book on a journey, and the apostles are constantly being remade on the road, adjusting and changing, renewing their faith and learning from various strangers on the road. The journeys in Acts are full of disagreement, danger and uncertainty, yet they become the very means through which God forms a new community. A community devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts:2:42). A community that discovers itself through a journey.

Journey changes us, or dare I say transforms us. It teaches us the courage to depart from what is

familiar while asking ourselves to be open to the strangeness we encounter. What makes a journey beautiful is the imperfection and the unexpected. The unexpected detours, the companions we meet, the questions raised, often becomes the most meaningful moments in a journey. Journey is not a single, one-way route. It does not always require a travel. If travel is about getting from one destination to another, a journey is somewhat nuanced. It is more than the departure and arrival, but dwells in the in-between, connecting the two. Life itself is a journey. Daily routines and ordinary moments, facing the fear and grief buried deep inside us is also a journey.

But perhaps to speak of journey in these lands now called Australia, humility is required. As a migrant, I am both a guest and a settler benefiting from a history that begins with dispossession. A history not of my making but something I need to seriously grapple with as I journey on this unceded land. This journey of reckoning is hard and challenging for many of us. It raises truth of the past that we might not be ready to face, but the First Peoples become generous companions on this journey. Their call to walk together is a grace-filled invitation.

So maybe, taking that first step is important. That first step becomes multiple steps, a walk and then maybe walking towards, walking together. The more I reflect on journey, the more I wonder if God is found less at the destination but in the walking itself. In the difficult truths that unsettle us and the moments of beauty that restores us.



As I continue to muse on journey, on becoming, on walking towards, on ending and beginnings, on this sacred in between space, a new journey awaits me as I join the Saltbush Ministry in the coming year. I will encounter new landscapes and people. There will be a new rhythm of ministry, a different way of being together, a different way of building relationship and understanding communities. I do not know exactly what waits ahead.

Will I be welcomed?

What stories will I hear?

What unexpected encounters will God prepare?

Will you be my companion on this journey?

Will we be strangers to one another and learn from one another?



On a journey: the Church as a Pilgrim People

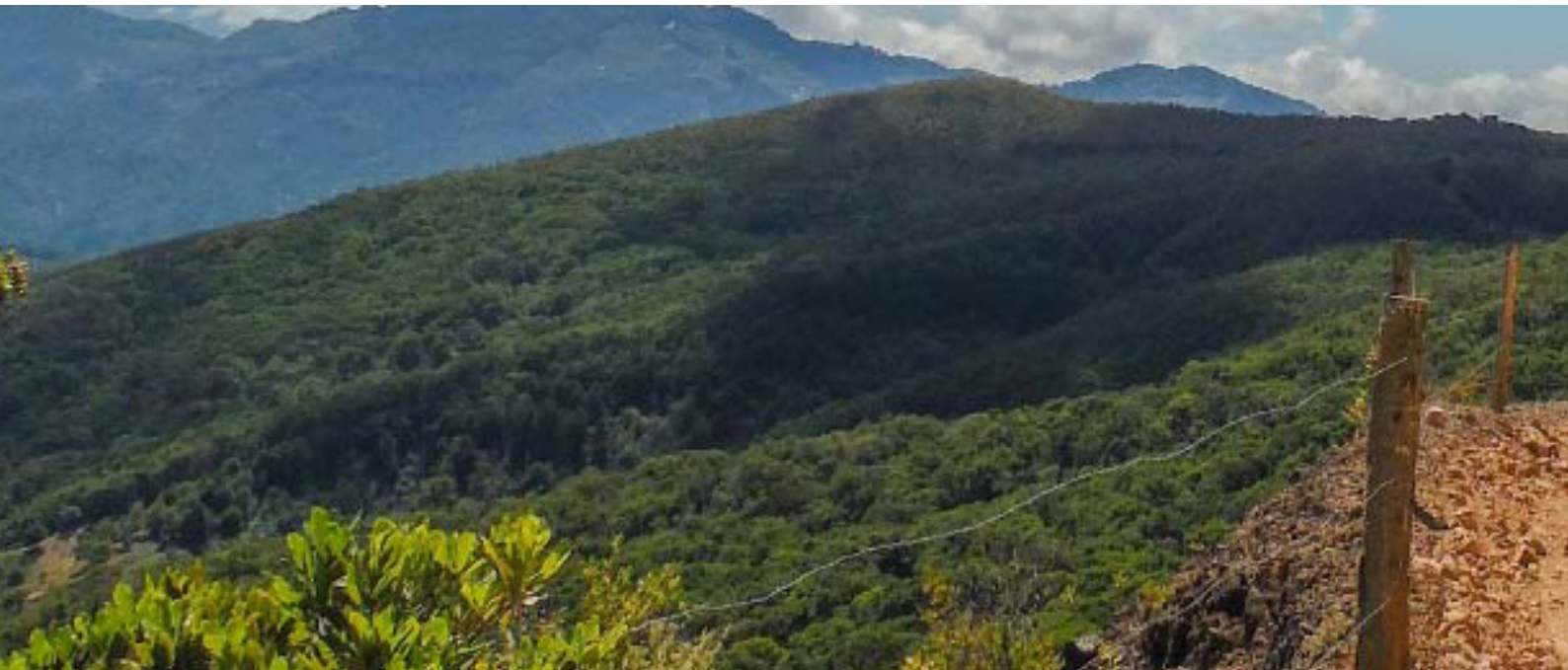
Rev. Dr Ockert Myer | United Theological College

To describe life as a journey as become commonplace in our times. And if the advertisement industry has latched onto it, you can be sure that it something that resonate with many people. ('Life is a journey; enjoy the ride')

What is even more interesting is how this image has found its way into what is perhaps the most popular metaphor in the UCA for the church: a pilgrim people. Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union explicitly uses the word to describe the church: "The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal..."

Perhaps apart from the church as the body of Christ, judged by the number of times I've heard it mentioned in church gatherings in the UCA, the pilgrim metaphor seems to have captured our journeying imaginations. There's hardly a capital city in Australia that does not have a Pilgrim (Uniting) Church. Even one of the theological colleges bear the 'Pilgrim' name.

The idea of life as a journey goes back thousands of years. Ancient cultures used journeys as metaphors for human existence, personal growth and the search for meaning. In ancient Greek philosophy the journey was often used to represent the pursuit of wisdom and self-knowledge. The underlying message is that life



isn't simply about reaching a destination. The experiences we have along the way help shape who we become.

> ...faith, hope and love; the true markers and sustenance of a pilgrim people.

However, the moment a word like 'pilgrim' increases in popularity, it usually decreases in meaning. That certainly seems to be the case for the way it is used in the church, or at least in the Uniting Church. Two things have struck me about the way it is used or understood in the church. First, it seems to imply that the journey or the travelling is the point of it all. Almost like the grey nomads travelling around Australia: there's no specific destination; it is about the adventure of the journey. Second, there also seems to be the idea that this travelling, this pilgrimage if you want, is a very much a biblical idea.

To begin with the latter. It may come as a surprise that the word 'pilgrim' does not appear in the New Revised Standard Version of the bible, the translation that is used in most Uniting Churches. It does appear twice in the King James translation: in Hebrews 11:13 and 1 Peter 2:11. In the NRSV the word 'pilgrim' is usually translated with 'foreigner'.

What is equally noteworthy is that the designation of the church as a 'pilgrim people' is also relatively new in the church history. There were of course ancient traditions of Christian pilgrimages, but these were individual journeys. It is only since the 1950's that the words 'pilgrim people' were used for the body of Christ, the church. In the OT related words are used for both Jacob ('A *wandering* Aramean was my ancestor' – Deut 26:5) and Abraham is described as a resident alien or *sojourner* in the land of Canaan (Gen 23:4). Some of these may inform our thinking about the church, but if it does, this is the result of more recent developments.



Turning to the way 'pilgrim people' is often understood in the church, as a people for whom the journey, the adventure, is the point of it all. Perhaps this is where the greatest difference lies in a proper theological understanding of the pilgrim image and the way it has become popularised.



Believers – in the sense of the body of Christ - are not simply people who happen to be on a journey. In much of the Bible, they are people whose relationship with God means they no longer regard the world as their ultimate home. Taken together, both the biblical references as well as the theological meaning of 'pilgrim people,' as it is found in the Basis of Union, puts the emphasis on walking with God, being transformed along the way, trusting God through uncertainty, and arriving at a destination that gives life its ultimate meaning.

God's people are not merely travelling companions, each seeking their own adventures, but are a community travelling through the world, shaped by faith, sustained by hope, and oriented towards a home they have not yet fully reached. In other words, what distinguishes the pilgrim people from people merely on a journey, is exactly the destination. The Basis of Union puts this beautifully: "...here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. 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."

In other words, a journey also holds the danger that we may get lost along the way. Therefore, we need a map (or GPS!) and a guide. As a pilgrim people we need the Word and the Spirit: our map and our guide.

The point of the map and the guide is not because the earthly journey is unimportant. Quite the contrary: the pilgrim people live in the present while orienting themselves towards that future. God has placed us on this earth. But

we are on a journey to the new earth. And it is the new earth that gives meaning to the journey of life on this earth.

In Hebrews 11-13 we see all of this in a nutshell: God's promises give the journey its direction and its destination. Faith enables people to travel without seeing the whole destination. The community and communion sustain them along the way. Hope enables them to endure what remains unfinished.

And there we have it, Paul's trilogy: faith, hope and love; the true markers and sustenance of a pilgrim people.



FAITH · HOPE · LOVE

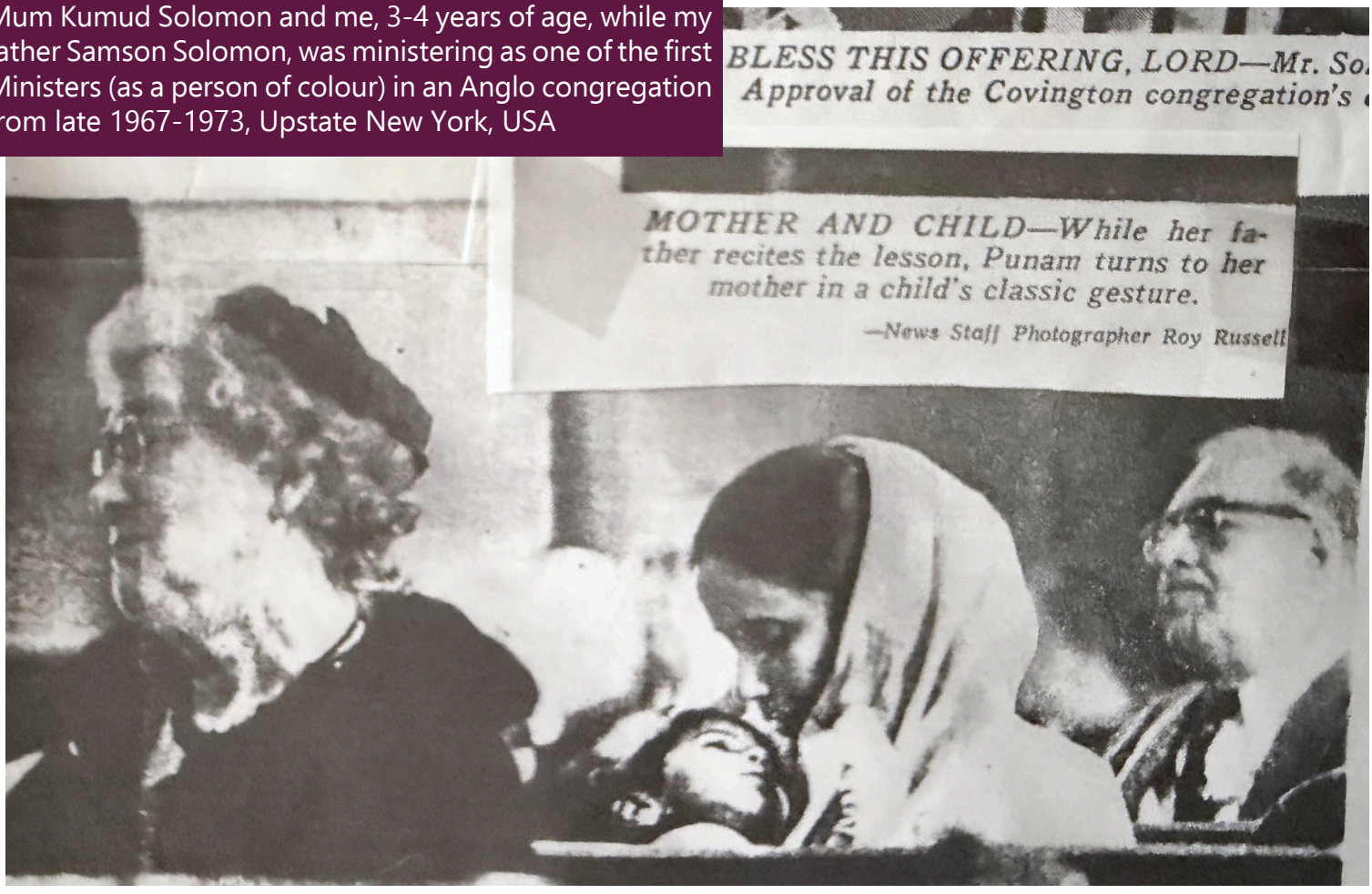


Safar Nama

Rev. Punam Bent | Associate General Secretary

As I sit down to write this article on the theme 'Journey' I pay my respects to the Dharug nation and its many clans who have left their indelible mark on places, waterways, and all that surrounds us in the flora and fauna, of where we call home, in these lands we now call Australia.

I came to hear of Australia, in year 5 geography and while I was a young child growing up in India. My grandfather Rev Yohan Prakash was a Minister in the Methodist Church connected to Great Britain, and Australia (CNI, Church of North India). I addressed him as Nana, in Hindi, and he often spoke of Australian Missionary friends who would visit him long after their time in ministry together, in Northern India (1930's- 40's), and I remember inheriting a brooch presented to my aunt by an Australian friend in the 1970's of a kangaroo embedded in gems. I took to overseas items like a Bowerbird collecting shiny objects, finding purpose in the randomness of things presented visually, growing up in a non-



Mum Kumud Solomon and me, 3-4 years of age, while my father Samson Solomon, was ministering as one of the first Ministers (as a person of colour) in an Anglo congregation from late 1967-1973, Upstate New York, USA

digital space where creativity was observance, and engagement was requesting our Elders to 'please tell us that story again when you….'

Later on, when I was studying at United Theological Seminary, in Dayton, Ohio (USA), around July 1988, having grown up in the Methodist Church in India, (an offshoot of the United Methodist Church, USA), I would chat to my fiancé Andrew then, about what it would be like living in Australia on our many walks together, and thinking about having a labrador or two. In 2026 we still have two labradors.

As I reflect on my own life, I have lived in the US for 12 years, 15 in India, and the remainder of my life in Australia till the present. How is it that the narrative of Abraham and Sarah, resonates with my story, engaging with the Divine in journey, growing, evolving, diminishing at times, and finding meaning through encounters with strangers. (Genesis 17-18) Visitors who brought God to the front door and had dinner with the family in a new place.

I grew up in a Post- Colonial India, still very much entrenched in the British Raj days. I couldn't speak the language of my family, Hindi and Urdu at home as depending on the status of your life and role in Christian communities as well, English was prioritised and language was frowned upon. I still enjoyed Urdu poetry and dialogues in film, and the richness of this language encompassing elements of Persian, Arabic and Hindi, became my identity and belonging, as much as speaking vernacular Hindi did. The detours can be life-giving.

In Urdu the word for journey is 'Safar' and in earlier Urdu poetry there is a concept of 'Safar Nama' (in Urdu: سفر نامہ, in Hindi: सफ़रनामा) literally means a travel diary, or account of a journey,

As I have pondered on language, culture and expression of journey, where Rumi the renowned 13th-century Persian poet, Islamic scholar, and mystic, wrote, 'As you start to walk on the way, the way appears.' To us as followers of Jesus, who is the 'Way, the truth, and the life,' (John 14) walking on the way, can be soul transforming and turbulent in the same instance. In fact, the early Christians were first known as 'people of the way.' (Acts 9:2)

Walking the way requires of us a willingness, urgency, and conviction, to take the step, to move somewhere, and to tarry when one must, as we gather wisdom, insight, experiences, and friendships on the way. Sometimes we pause in awe, and silence. Sometimes it's a lonely trek, and at others it can be company. As I write to you in the Saltbush space, I reach out through this article and pray that the journey may not be too cumbersome, that you like others before you may be able to glean the richness of our faith and practice through these years.



Dad and his congregation at Wyoming Methodist Church, USA

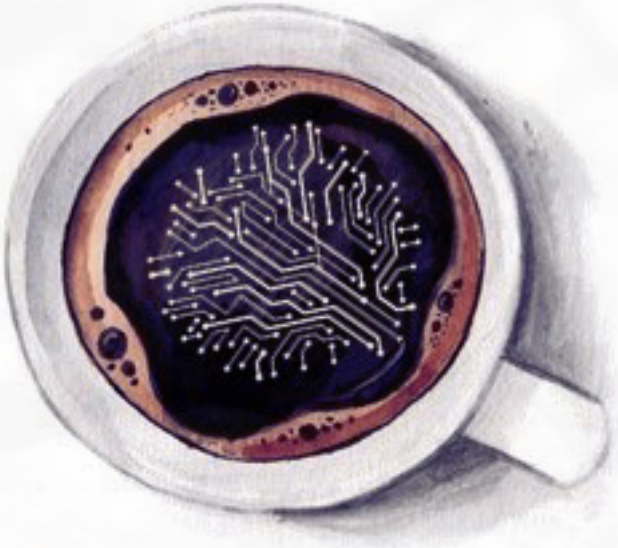
Even through the dearth of ministry connections at times, may we celebrate the wealth of our lay leaders, Bush Chaplains, ministers, preachers and teachers and most of all communities who have survived and lived with a song that witnesses to the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially when climate challenges, isolation, and loss of resources all round, can be difficult to encounter, and at times plunge us into lament (which we must in prayer and litany).

May the Lord Jesus who walked with Cleopas and his friend to Emmaus (Luke 24) warm our hearts as we listen to the God who is stranger and friend, and the unseen guest at every table conversation.

Blessings and Shalom as you engage in your own Safar Nama!

Your fellow Sojourner

Punam Bent



Saltbush Lectionary Group.

Each Mondary at 9.30am.

Each Monday morning at 9.30am meet with your Saltbush team for gentle conversation around the Gospel lectionary reading for the Sunday ahead. Open to all lay leaders and people from across the land.

The Zoom ID is: 915 4290 7078



Age is the Getting of Wisdom

Merilyn Mosher | Rylstone Uniting Church

"Age is the getting of wisdom" is a well-known phrase, and as I reflect on my spiritual life journey, I can now see that this saying is certainly applicable.



Journeys are interesting as this word can be used to describe so many events. Travelling to new and interesting places, either here in Australia or overseas is always exciting, enjoying the beautiful world that God has created. A journey that seems straight; from A to B. Other journeys encompass twists, curves, circles, emotional highs, extreme lows, crossing over and intertwining with others on their journeys, while still having an impact on our own. I like to think that we have a life journey, which encompasses event journeys along the way. This has been my own experience.

For generations, my family have always been involved with the church and being part of that community is now almost a part of my DNA. Father, nephew, grandfather and great grandfather are all, or were, ministers and now I find myself part of the Rylstone lay ministry team.

Consequently, ministers and their families have continually been a presence on my spiritual journey. Born in Castlemaine Victoria, not only gave me a love of the country, but also where I experienced my first treasury post. The offering plate had gone missing, instigating a wide search. Dad found me outside counting out the money. As a two-year-old, I had obviously watched others performing this task and now it was my turn!

Moving to Melbourne as a family, there were so many people who influenced me. I remember Rev. Lyall Dixon, a wonderful and wise gentleman, who always found something positive to say about a person being discussed, even if he agreed with the negative words being spoken. Something I still try to aspire to. Rev. Geoff and Nan Barnes were virtually part of our family as (Uncle) Geoff and Dad had been through Theological college together. These two people and their family were very special to me and had an influence on my journey, not only in Melbourne but also in Sydney, where they moved soon after us.

Moving to Sydney was hard as a teenager. Friends and family remained in Melbourne and trying to establish new friends at the age of 17 was difficult, particularly in an already established youth group, while navigating both study and a new job. Being a PK (preacher's kid) carried a lot of expectations and not always understanding. Becoming a Sunday School teacher was obligatory and often felt like a burden although I did enjoy my students, even when one of the boys climbed out of the window. He felt that there were other interests outside!

Here in the Gordon/West Pymble parish, there were wonderful times and people who we were able to share our Christian faith with, and it was in the Gordon Congregational Church that I was first married. Dad was my father, that day, not my minister, while (Uncle) Geoff officiated. Lloyd and I were so happy and looking forward to our life together. Sadly, five years later, a brain tumour took him away from me and our two-year-old daughter. This was the lowest emotional point of my journey. I could not understand why this was happening and where was God in all of this sadness? He had been holding me and it was only later, looking back, that I understood. The support that I received from the Young women's Bible Study Group, at Terrigal Uniting church, Ann and Dennis Towner, the prayer group at Pymble Chapel carried me through this diabolic time. To all of them I say a grateful and heartfelt thank you. We are never alone on our journeys.

Life moved on, and seven years later, I married Max, who just happened to be one of the groomsmen at our wedding and Lloyd's best friend. This time, Dad did marry us in the beautiful Pymble Chapel. This also meant relocating back to Sydney and joining in with the Dee Why /Cromer Uniting Church. Regardless of where you move, there is always a Christian community to become part of. The Cecil Gribble Tongan community was part of this parish and gave me an added awareness of other cultural communities and their journeys. Here part of my journey formed a circle. Little did I know that the young girl playing with others at a Tongan event would turn out to be none other than Rev. Natasha He, whom I met again through Saltbush at a Cluster gathering with Rylstone Uniting church.

Here in Rylstone is where I feel that my spiritual journey has become something rather special, but also challenging these days. Church numbers are declining, however the day to day running is still the same, even more so with technology, which I have found out, having been treasurer of our Cluster for seven years. Being part of the lay ministry team has also been a challenge, particularly doing services, (thanks Graeme Gardiner), but now, using resources such as "Word around the Bush", "Project Reconnect" and the support of our amazing Pastor Greg Smith, this task is not as arduous.

My journey is now also taking a curve, turning to looking after God's creation, and here on our farm, where I am the farmer and Max is my manager, I am continually revegetating with Australian native plants, while looking after my family, including grandchildren in Mudgee. This is apart from friends who also need support.

What a journey this has been thus far, and now in the latter part of my life, I look forward to what is ahead knowing that God is always there for all of us. I pray that your journey has also been a fruitful one.





News from Saltbush

Rev. Mark Faulkner | Saltbush Ministry Team Leader

The Saltbush team plan each year well in advance, including the themes for each edition of Ruminations. So, our theme "Journey" was chosen at the end of 2025! And, like every year, for Saltbush, 2026 has been a journey of a year too; amongst all the wider uncertainty and chaos, the work and the ministry amongst people from across the land and the road together as a team.

The journey now, for our team of Tim, Natasha and I, has come to a fork as we farewell Tim who heads to a congregation in Darwin, NT. Tim has been instrumental in shaping the ministry of Saltbush and for his theology, his passion for rural congregational life and his personal insight we have much to be thankful for. Tim has been a committed and undistracted part of the Saltbush team, but this is his time for another road and journey in life and ministry.

If you have every driven widely throughout the country, along lonely roads, you may understand, as it is for me, that little bit of fear, or awe, and what it is to be so insignificant within the vastness. The place where you rely on the map, not the GPS. The place where you don't exactly know what to expect. The place where the sky and silence are overwhelming. It's not a journey into the unknown, but it is a journey into the unsure.

For each of us in the Saltbush team, perhaps that is the road we are on.



This type of journey, this road, is also true for our new Saltbush Scattered Community Minister, Rev. Hee Won Chang. Hee Won will be moving with her family from a congregation in Sydney to Canberra to begin her ministry with the Saltbush Team. Hee Won brings a strong, humble leadership, theological and spiritual insight and a passion for ministry on the edge of the church, which is where Saltbush finds itself and thrives.

Natasha and I are thankful for Hee's pondering and response to this new call as we begin shared ministry together across the land.

Rev. Hee Won's Induction will be at Henty Uniting Church, on Sunday 14th. February 2027 at 9.30am.

Over this past year we have been encouraged by our growing ministry amongst lay leaders and particularly through our resourcing and Lay Leader retreats. In 2027 we will be extending our retreat time for lay leaders and giving new consideration to the way we lead our Saltbush Gatherings.

Please remember, that Natasha, Hee and I are always available to you or to your congregations if you want to be in touch for conversation, encouragement or resources.



As we come into this Christmas season, with all its many messages, images and demands, may there be moments of peace and the presence of the Christ. The world into which Jesus was born was obviously conflicted, uncertain and torn. People's lives and beliefs were fragile and fading. So too in our own days and for our world, we need once more to be reminded of the Way of Christ, born amongst us, Emmanual, God with us!

Friends, peace to you all.

Mark .



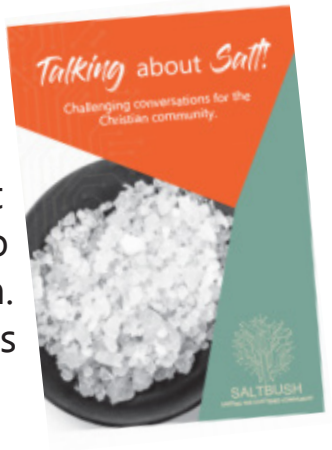
Saltbush Relational Resources

Saltbush Cafés
In regular series of three or four nights the Saltbush team hold online cafés centred around diverse themes or readings. Saltbush cafés are easy to attend, relaxed and an encouraging way to meet other and explore life and faith together.

Scattered Community Gatherings
Three to four times a year in different rural or coastal location the Saltbush team hold Scattered Community Gatherings. You can also attend these online from wherever you are to wherever we are. These gatherings are centred around worship, encouragement, education and the practice of discipleship.

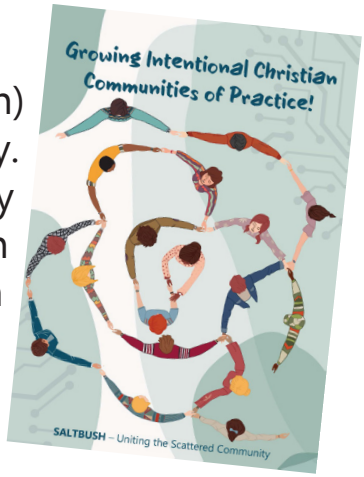
Word around the Bush
Each week of the year the Saltbush team present a visual message based on the lectionary reading for that week. You are free to watch and use in your own congregation this message. You can also print off the Saltbush liturgy that is provided each week to accompany the visual message.

Talking about Salt
This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to have some discussion around who you are, how you gather and how you live out your faith. Talking about Salt is five difficult conversations for congregations and can also be used to shape a life and witness discussion and consultation. Talking about Salt is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



Intentional Christian Communities
This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to think about the challenge of being intentional in how we gather as the Christian community.

Dive into any part of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) and you will find Jesus intentionally going about his ministry. At times it looks like chaos and no doubt it was, but at every step Jesus acts with intention. Growing Intentional Christian Communities of Practice is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



The Great Unravelling

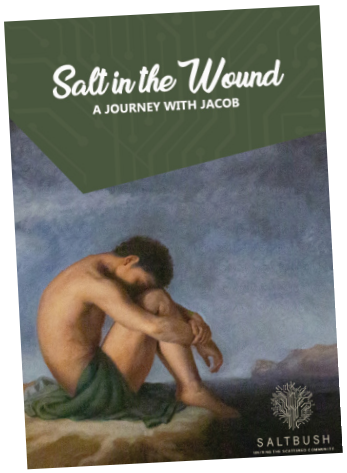


The Saltbush team have prepared six conversations as part of our reading of the book:

Joining God in the Great Unravelling by Alan J. Roxburgh.

However, these conversations are not a study guide to the book, but an invitation to open ourselves to deeply consider who and how we, the church, our christian communities, are participating in the ways of God beyond ourselves.

Salt in the Wound



This is an uncomfortable set of conversations. Like salt in a wound, they sting and irritate before they can soothe and heal. We hope you will sit with them – on your own or, preferably, with a small group of people with whom you are willing to explore your life and faith. There are seven chapters, each representing a particular phase in Jacob's life story and focusing on a specific theme. You can work through each in sequence or choose four significant to your current life phase or the life of your congregation for a month-long small group study.

Digital packages for congregations

If your congregation would like a Saltbush digital package so that you can use and connect with us and the wider church please simply get in touch. A digital package includes: smart tv, mobile stand for the tv, all connectors and cables, TV, camera and our support to set it all up.

Visits

The Saltbush team are always willing to visit your congregation or group to meet you, talk with you about how it is for you as a congregation or Christian community and how you seek to be part of the missional relationship with others. Simply get in touch and one of the Saltbush team will come to visit you.

Look on our website under **Word, Ruminations, Talking about Salt** or **Contact Us**.

Ruminations is brought to you as part of **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community**. The Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT oversees this work as an encouragement to all rural Christian communities and their leaders, irrespective of size or location. You are invited to share this issue of Ruminations with others.

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Uniting the Scattered Community

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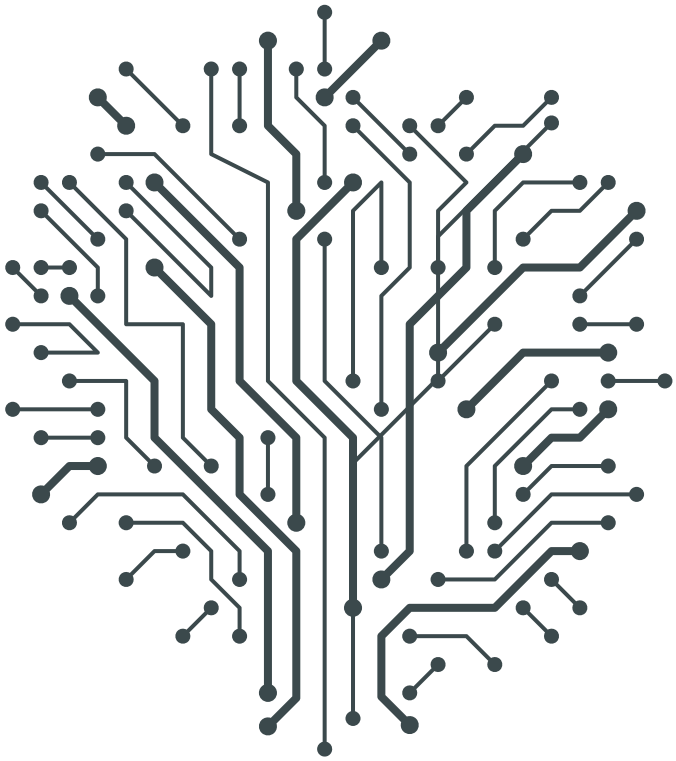

SALTBUSH

UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY