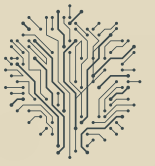


Ruminations

Spring-Summer 2025/26



SALTBUSH
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Expectations



Contributors

Rev. Dr Peter Walker was affirmed by the Synod as the General Secretary. Previously the Principal of Uniting Theological College and Director of Education, Peter has guided the teaching and formation of ministry candidates and other students of ministry and theology. Peter has taken up the position of General Secretary of the Synod of NSW and ACT in October.

Rose-Mary Faulkner-Schwartz is a visual artist working primarily in the medium of glass, based on Ngunnawal and Ngambri land in Canberra. Rose-Mary works from both her studio at the Canberra Glassworks and her private studio at home. In addition to her studio practice, Rose-Mary works in primary education, galleries and museum environments with children and is passionate about children's education in art.

Rev. Jeff Savage, Minister of Word and Sacrament

Jeff has been involved in first third of life, family and children's ministry from the time he entered into ministry until he and his wife, Denise moved to Hobart, where Jeff became the minister for the Hobart North UCA. Jeff's has been engaged in ministry in Bundaberg, Rockhampton and Perth. He worked for the Perth Diocese of the Anglican church on secondment from the UCA working in Children and Family ministry with 110 parishes. Jeff is now in shared ministry at Lismore Region UCA alongside Denise.

Rev. Denise Savage, Minister of Deacon

Prior to entering ministry Denise trained as a Registered Nurse. Denise has engaged in many varied ministries from Pastoral Care and Liturgy liaison worker as Presbytery minister for Vic/Tas Synod in southern Tasmania focusing on Leadership Formation and Resourcing/Pastoral care. Denise is now in shared ministry at Lismore Region UCA alongside her husband Jeff.

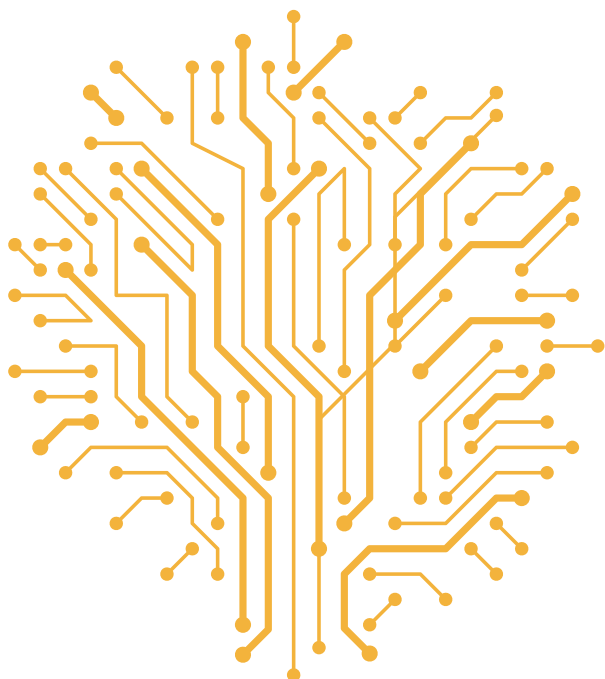
Dame Joy Cowley is a New Zealand author of children's fiction and adult novels. She has won many awards and honours, including the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement and the Storylines Margaret Mahy Award.

Rev. Dr John Squires lives in Dungog NSW and has been a lecturer at UTC (New Testament), Presbytery Minister in three presbyteries with significant numbers of rural congregations and is now the Editor of the daily Bible reading resource, With Love to the World.



What's in this issue of Ruminations?

Editor's Introduction: Expectations	2
Greetings from the General Secretary	4
Reader's Letters, Experiences & Photo's	8
Expectations	10
Women who wait	14
New Beginning	18
I'm sitting this one out.....	20
Pslams Down Under.....	23
News from Saltbush.....	24





Editor's Introduction: Expectations

Rev. Tim Jensen | Scattered Community Minister

Expectations! We may labour under the weight of expectations that we have either placed on ourselves or from others, particularly family. When one of my children were completing their HSC I made the pronouncement that I expected them to study law as they were doing very well at school and had the aptitude to become a good lawyer, so I thought. They caught me off guard and with a straight face and no hint of humour said, 'no Dad I'm going to be a long-haul truckie'. I turned, walked away and despite me knowing this child was telling me to back off, I knew any expectations I had about their career choice was unfair and more about me.

We all have expectations about anything and everything, anyone and everyone. Some we know are unreasonable, some are hopeful, some expectations grow us and some are draining. Expectations are part of all our days, moments, hope and of course, faith. We have expectations on how we believe God should act or what we believe God expects of us. These faith expectations can be incredibly healthy leading us into a deeper and more authentic relationship with God and with ourselves. Having the expectation that we love our neighbour as ourselves would hopefully lead us into those places of compassion, mercy, forgiveness and grace. Then again, some faith expectations can also be damning especially if we expect God to be a vengeful angry god. Whatever our expectations, we are changed and challenged by them, they bring us to places of honesty and understanding as well as disappointment.

We are so grateful for those who have written about their own experiences of Expectations in this spring/summer issue of Ruminations.

Denise Savage speaks of moving to a new placement and the expectations that she anticipates and experiences in the newly renovated Lismore church and the new way Lismore Region churches are restructuring themselves. Denise explores all the different hopes and challenges churches face as they are open to the leading of God.

Jeff Savage (Denise's husband and colleague) writes about the unrelenting demands Jesus faced from others, even in his times of deep weariness when he



needed to rest. Jeff recalls an experience when in his own exhausted state, for his own desperate need for rest, he refused a request to visit a dying patient in hospital.

Rose-Mary Faulkner-Schwartz explores what it means to be an expectant mother and the experiences of those who have gone before her. Rose-Mary contemplates the weight of expectation on Mary, the mother of Jesus as she chooses in her own quiet and maybe also fearful way, to act in faith and trust. Rose-Mary's writes 'To be expecting, is a very gentle way to say 'everything is changing' – allowing us all to ponder what expecting will change.

Peter Walker wants us to consider where the centre of ministry resides. He challenges our expectations that it is somewhere in North Parramatta. We may think that the Centre for Ministry is where all the action is, but the answer might be closer to home.

We have the pleasure of Dame Joy Cowley from New Zealand contributing a poem to our edition. An inspiring poem that we can sit with and return to as a way of prayerful reflection and worship.

John Squires explores the expectations placed on Jesus, the expectations we place on the church and our place in the church and the expectations we have of ourselves. As expectations are an important part of life that we all must consider, John asks, how do we manage our expectations? How might we work together to make our expectations a reality?

We trust that you will be challenged and encouraged by the excellent articles in this issue of Ruminations. We hope that as you explore your own expectations, the Spirit of God brings you peace, compassion and wisdom.

Tim



Greetings from the General Secretary

Rev. Dr Peter Walker | General Secretary of Synod of NSW and the ACT

CENTRE AND PERIPHERY?

We all have habits of thought and speech that are worth holding up to the light for closer inspection, so we can test our assumptions. Challenge our expectations.

One of those hard-wired expectations, which is also baked into the habits of our language, is the way we tend to think and talk about 'centre' and 'periphery'. Let me try to explain with an example.

I've worked for seven years in a place called the Centre for Ministry. It is a place where people meet, talk, and learn about ministry. And because it is in Sydney and is well resourced (relatively), we think of it as the important place for such meetings and learning about ministry. We call it the Centre. But it's not.

On the other hand, along with the 'Centre for Ministry', there are about 330 congregations and communities of the Uniting Church in this Synod where people meet, talk and learn about ministry – their own, the ministry of the church, and the ministry of Jesus Christ. Those communities are clustered in some areas, and more scattered in others. Some are scattered enough that we call them 'remote'. Indeed they are, geographically. We tend to think of them as being the periphery.



Yet where is the centre and where is the periphery when it comes to ministry? What expectations and assumptions are leading us as we answer that question? Do they need challenging?

Why don't we overturn the expectations baked into our language (and imaginations) that things in the city are the centre and things that are scattered and remote are the periphery? Because the thing is, when we name anything 'centre' we are elevating its importance.

My expectations were challenged (thankfully) and changed. The centre for ministry in the church is not a big facility in a city. They are a blessing, of course. The centre for ministry is our congregations. They are not peripheral. They are central. Likewise, our faith communities and chaplaincies, and all the places and ways people serve Christ in the world.

Let's keep reminding ourselves that congregations, and not presbyteries, synods or assembly, are the only portion of the church that the Basis of Union describes as 'the embodiment in one place of the one holy catholic and apostolic church'. And, as you know, catholic here means universal. The embodiment in the Uniting Church of the universal, worldwide church are our congregations. They are the centre for ministry.

To all our congregations and people, the centre of our ministry, I send my greeting.

Reader's Letters - Experiences - Photos

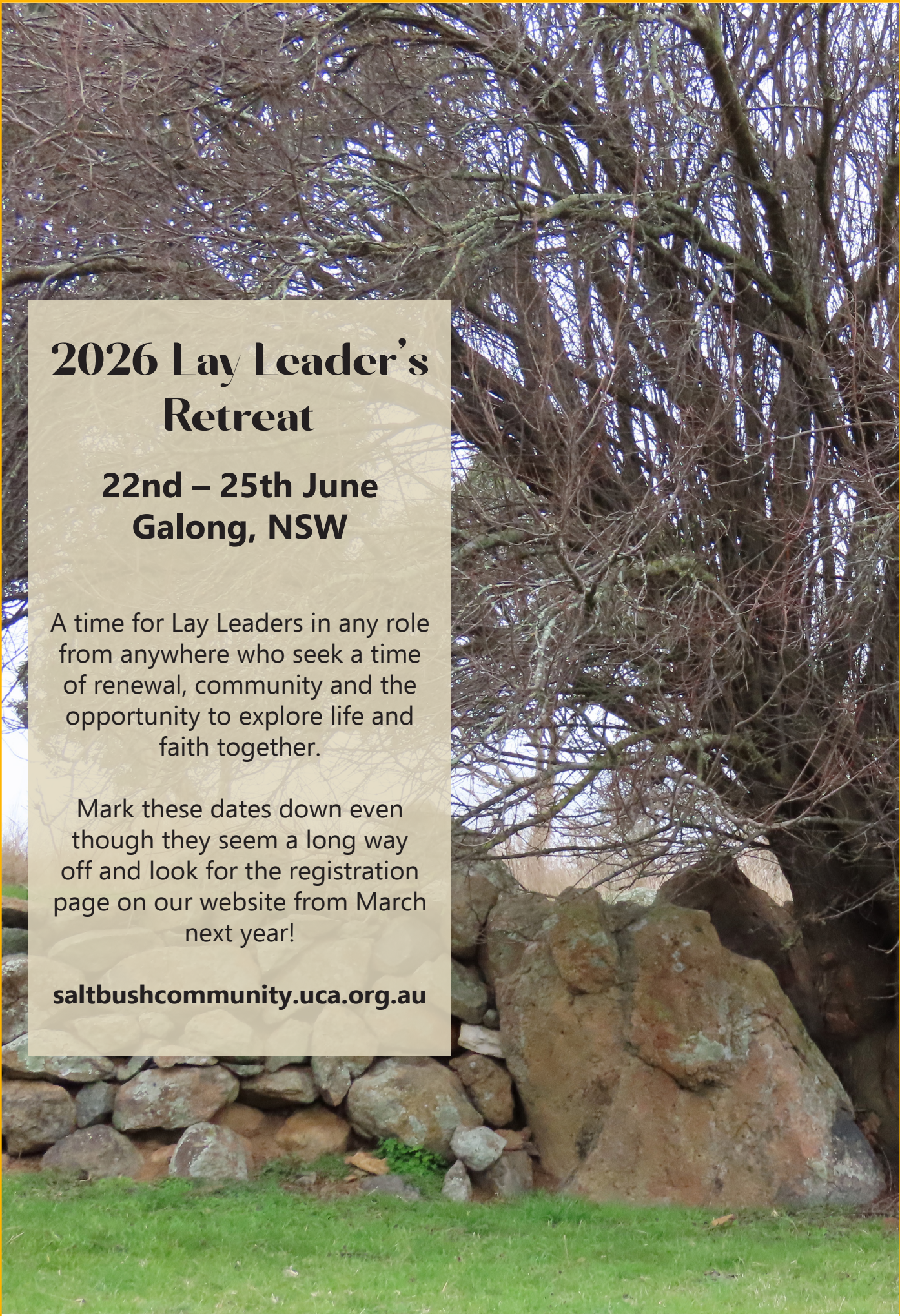
We'd like to hear from you!

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 2025 which are Lost, Saltbush and Expectations, 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.





2026 Lay Leader's Retreat

**22nd – 25th June
Galong, NSW**

A time for Lay Leaders in any role from anywhere who seek a time of renewal, community and the opportunity to explore life and faith together.

Mark these dates down even though they seem a long way off and look for the registration page on our website from March next year!

saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au



Expectations

Rev. Dr John Squires | Dungog

I'm writing this piece just at the time when "expectations" are swirling around the church. The Synod of NSW.ACT has recently met, and given consideration to "The Presbytery Project", which has the subtitle "Future Directions for the People of God on the Way". The expectations surrounding the move to the Three Presbyteries Model are no doubt clear: sharing of resources, mobilising of personnel, collaboration of teams, hope for the future.

Just after that meeting, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania met and adopted their vision for the future, entitled the "Faithful Futures Project". It is setting expectations in that Synod; it aims "to prepare the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania for the next 10 to 15 years". And, of course, right across Australia, the church has been pondering the outcomes of the 2024 Assembly, when the Act2 Project was received and its proposals adopted. Already newly-constituted Commissions are meeting, planning the steps ahead in their respective areas. No doubt they have expectations about what they will achieve.

Indeed, even in my small rural church, we have had a recent process in which people have shared "what I hope for this church", learning about better ways to



be welcoming, and setting out steps for mission in the local community. And the Presbytery in which I live has a neat slogan on its website, declaring that it seeks to "Live by Faith, be Known by Love, and be a Voice of Hope".

*"Live by Faith,
be Known by
Love, and be a
Voice of Hope"*

Expectations abound at every level!

Jesus was no stranger to the basic human element of "expectations". He didn't know about the anticipatory joy of an expectant parent, looking to the birth of their child. He presumably was a stranger to the bubbling internal expectations that mount when you have just two months before you start that "dream job" that you have just been offered. And I am not sure that he ever took part in a day-long, facilitated workshop of setting forth the "purpose, mission, and values" of a faith community!

But Jesus knew about expectations. The earliest account of his adult life tells us that his first words in public were words of expectation: "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). In another account of his life, he is reported as saying "the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; ... in fact, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20-21). That surely must have set his followers agog as they scurried to determine just how this expectation of the coming kingdom was, in fact, now present among them.

Indeed, Jesus lived at a time when expectations were running high amongst his people. This was not a new thing. In the foundational story of the Exodus from Egypt, it is said that Moses offered words of expectation to the people: "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again" (Exod 14:13).

The scrolls containing the words of the prophets, which faithful Jews would have known quite well, were full of words of expectation: "the days are coming when all that is in your house will be carried off to Babylon", announced Isaiah (Isa 39:16); "the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah", said Jeremiah, during that exile (Jer 31:31); "I am coming to gather all nations and tongues", declared an anonymous prophet after the people had returned from Babylon (Isa 66:18). Each important step in the story of Israel had been prophetically signalled by a word of expectation.



And by the time of Jesus, after centuries of continuing foreign rule, and after a series of uprisings, defeats, compromises, and plots to regain control, expectations continued to run amok amongst the Jewish population. For some, the expectation was that they would someday regain political control of their land (the zealots and political revolutionaries of the day). For others, the expectation took shape in a vision of “the sons of light” waging a final cataclysmic battle against “the sons of darkness” (as in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls). Still others held to the word of the Lord, “I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” (Mal 3:1).

It was this latter expectation that had gripped John, as he carried out his programme of calling people to repentance and baptising them in the river. And as he did so, the man from Nazareth came and submitted himself for baptism. “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” one later writer claimed that he said (John 1:20). His expectations had come to pass in ways that perhaps even he had not thought possible.

The followers of Jesus certainly had expectations about him. “Are you the one who is to come?”—the question that John had sent his followers to ask of Jesus (Matt 11:3; Luke 7:19)—soon became their question. Expectations about what Jesus would achieve abounded. “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem

John Swanson. River. 1987.

The artist has granted permission for the non-commercial use of this image with attribution.

Israel", two of his followers mused, soon after he had been put to death (Luke 24:21). That was some expectation, to be sure!

Some of those not as enchanted by the way of Jesus also had expectations about him. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly", they taunted him (John 10:24). Hovering somewhere around Jesus was the expectation that he might in fact be the figure long hoped-for, come to redeem Israel. And even as he hung in the cross, he was again mocked and taunted: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:31–32). Again, that expectation that he was someone significant—or that he thought he was someone significant—is in play. Just what might we expect from this Galilean stirrer?

The path that Jesus trod both met expectations, but also failed to meet expectations. He did achieve something significant; but he did not do so in the way that was most surely expected. He would redeem Israel; but only by giving his life. He would be shown to be Messiah; but not on the clouds of glory—rather, on a rough wooden cross. "Truly this man was God's Son!", the Roman soldier is claimed to have said as he witnessed this cruel death (Mark 15:39). And let's not get too caught up in the complexities of the apocalyptic expectations that swirled around at the time—expectations that Jesus addressed, and redefined, in one of his longer teaching sessions (Mark 13:5–37). On the one hand, he is clear that something unexpected and yet long yearned-for will indeed take place ("they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power", Mark 13:26). The expectations people held in relation to him were justified, it would seem.

And yet, he warns his followers to "beware that no one leads you astray" with specific timetables (13:5), advising them that chaotic times of cosmic upheaval are nothing "but the beginning of the birth pangs" (13:8), there will be suffering that will need to be faced and endured (13:19), and insisting that "about that day or hour no one knows" (13:32), that "you do not know when the time will come" (13:33, 35). Expectations may be raised, hopes may be high; but resolution is not easily attained.

So how do we deal with expectations? "Managing expectations" has entered the language both of business practice and of personal psychology. We need to be wary of setting expectations too high. Thinking about how all nations will flock to Jerusalem is setting expectations too high. They didn't, and they won't (especially today, in the fiery political landscape of Israel and Palestine). So too is expecting that everyone will see clearly that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Son of God who is the one to perform miracles at will and the one to redeem all of Israel and all of the nations—that, too, is unrealistic. We haven't seen this, and

*"peace be with
you ... as the
Father has sent
me, so I send you
... receive the
Holy Spirit"*

he hasn't redeemed everyone at all. Life continues on despite the failure to meet such high expectations.

And in similar fashion, setting expectations too low is something we should avoid. The young adult comes home from their first attempt at sitting for a drivers license, and proudly announces "I got it!" Dad looks up, amazed, and responds, "Wow! I really didn't think you'd get it this time". The expectation was set low, the triumph evaporates all-so-quickly. We need to manage our expectations: not too high, not too low.

And what of expectations we might have for our church community? Have you talked together in your congregation or faith community about what you hope for? what you would love to see happen? what you could work together to try to achieve? what you can pray for, bringing reason and knowledge into your words of hope and expectation to God?

We should have expectations; we should talk about our expectations; and most importantly, we should be working together to see how we might achieve those expectations, and make them become a reality. Sometimes that can be a hard thing to do. Nevertheless, it is central to our life together.

As for expectations in our own personal spiritual life: that's another area to consider carefully. We all have our familiar daily or weekly practices. They may be shaped by years of loving care and devoted repetition; we may be growing into a particular spiritual practice as we return to it consistently over time; or we may be now just "trying something new" in our spiritual life. Whatever the case may be, we have expectations about what that spiritual practice will do for us, and how it will help nurture our life of discipleship. We should identify our personal expectations and see how we are moving towards achieving them.



At the end of three of the Gospels, there are words that Jesus is reported as saying as he appeared, after his resurrection, to his followers. These words set the expectations for his followers. Matthew reports his words, “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). In these words, Jesus offers a clear set of expectations.

Luke reports that he said “you are witnesses of these things”, of all that he has told them, so he offers them a command which contains an expectation: “stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:48–49). In the subsequent volume written by Luke, the expectation and the charge is clear: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Most simply of all, John has Jesus say to the disciples, “peace be with you ... as the Father has sent me, so I send you ... receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21–22). Whichever Gospel account we prioritise for ourselves, the charge is clear—and the sense of expectation is strong. And so may it be for us, day after day, as we walk the way of Jesus, full of expectation!



Women who wait

Rose-Mary Faulkner-Schwartz | Queanbeyan

I've always had high expectations of myself, I like to get it right, preferably the first time. This eliminates plenty of uncomfortable sensations; uncertainty, failure, disappointment, the nuance of the grey area. I don't recall ever experiencing a situation or external pressure to result in holding myself to such high expectations, but as a general life rule, if everything's as it 'should' be then all is well.

Expectations are generally classified as holding a strong belief or hope that something will go to plan or be the case in the future. And so, there has been no single bigger experience to challenge my expectations of myself and the big 'should' than pregnancy. If I thought I was in control, I was unequivocally wrong. Our path to pregnancy was not straightforward, and I was deeply humbled by the first very significant realisation in my life that I was not in control, and that uncertainty, failure, disappointment and the nuance of the grey area can occur even when you do everything right.

Last Christmas, during this time of waiting for pregnancy, as the time seemed to continue passing and worries felt that they'd overcome hope, I wandered into a local Catholic cathedral as I passed it enroute to a book shop. I've always liked the light and history of cathedrals, the way they tower and humble you. I found myself here, in hindsight, in a space of desperation. On one side of the pews was the familiar, typical statue of Mary, hand on heart, head slightly tilted. On the other side of the cathedral, a smaller wooden carving of Joseph. The scattering of people seated were divided, men with Joseph, women with Mary, like an unspoken rule. At the foot of Mary was an eftpos machine, set to \$2, a steep price to light a candle. Why not, I thought, tapping away \$2 and placing a candle in one of the little holders set out in rows. I took the box of matches and opened it. It was empty. I audibly chuckled at the irony of it and noticed there were multiple unlit candles in rows at Mary's feet. Had all these women seen the humour in their moment of \$2 prayer being seemingly incomplete? I bet Joseph didn't have this problem, I thought. I crossed to the Joseph side, a few heads were raised as I walked over. As I suspected, Joseph had two boxes of matches, full. I took a box for the team, and walked back to Mary, lighting my own candle and then the other unlit prayers, and leaving the rest back at Mary's feet.



I have thought about Mary and the unlit prayers of unknown women at different times since last Christmas. Namely since becoming pregnant. I wonder what expectations did Mary have of pregnancy? We generally speak of the miracle of the virgin woman suddenly carrying the world's most famous baby with sheer delight and awe. But what of Mary's thoughts? Recorded by the men around her, shared through oral accounts, the Bible omits any moments of deep fear and late-night anxiety that would have crept into Mary's heart during her pregnancy, and I don't believe that's because they didn't occur. There are small moments of doubt recorded, her confiding in her cousin Elizabeth, but the overriding message we remember of Mary is a woman who, on learning her entire world is about to be overturned, chooses faith and trust. In her quiet moments though, did she confide in an unrecorded friend that her body felt foreign, that she feared the change, that she had no idea what to expect and that she maybe wished she'd had a choice?

To be expecting, is a very gentle way to say 'everything is changing'. Despite the significant differences between our times in history, both Mary and I will have constructed our expectations of pregnancy from the stories and shared knowledge told to us by others. It is the knowledge shared with me from other women that has shaped for me what it means to be expecting. I have learnt through these stories that there is no right way to navigate this time, and that the stronger I hold to the expectations I set for myself the less at peace I feel with this process. I've also learnt that past generations encountered pregnancy with far less certainty than I, my own experience heavily scaffolded by modern medicine and science. I feel myself now, with hope feeling stronger against worries, in a connected web of women before me who have carried the duality of expecting with uncertainty, anticipation, preparation, vulnerability and hope. I feel a strength from this shared experience of navigating our expectations of pregnancy, birth and matrescence - the experiences of my mother and grandmothers and their mothers and grandmothers, women in small rural communities and big cities, women who gather in circles to bless an unborn child, Indigenous women who birth



Imago Dei: Expectant Mother, oil on canvas, Michelle Arnold Paine.

*Ultimately, that's
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powerfully on Country, women of the Bible like Hannah and Rachel who cried out during their infertility, and of course Mary perhaps holding the biggest expectation of us all. All these women waited, carried with them a hope for what was to come, imagining different versions of a future reality. I wonder now, how many of the unlit prayer candles were for hopeful expectations and how many were placed in seasons of waiting. As though expecting is faith in motion, waiting on something, a surrender to things beyond our control. By their nature, expectations look forward and hold hope.

Ultimately, that's what it means to be expecting; holding hope and waiting.

This festive season will be different. My high expectations are humbled and I am finding peace in letting them go. I will adjust for what is to come; physically, emotionally and spiritually. What if in this upcoming season, which holds such high expectations for many people, God invites us to trade our expectations for a period of expecting? What would that look like in your life, to wait, prepare, trust and sit in the uncertainty knowing God is there beside you? May we shift from holding tight to outcomes, and open space to wait with wonder and trust in the unknown.





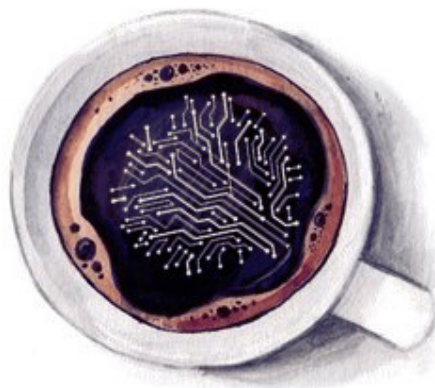
Advent Saltbush Café

Gather with people from across the land on three Wednesday evenings this Advent as we continue our theme of "expectations". Our Café's simply explore life and faith through the Gospels, prayer, music and reflection. You are welcome.

Wednesday 26th November, then 3rd and 10th. December starting at 7.30pm.

The Zoom ID to join this café is:
935 3699 3033

For more information:
saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au



Saltbush Lectionary Group.

Each Monday 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



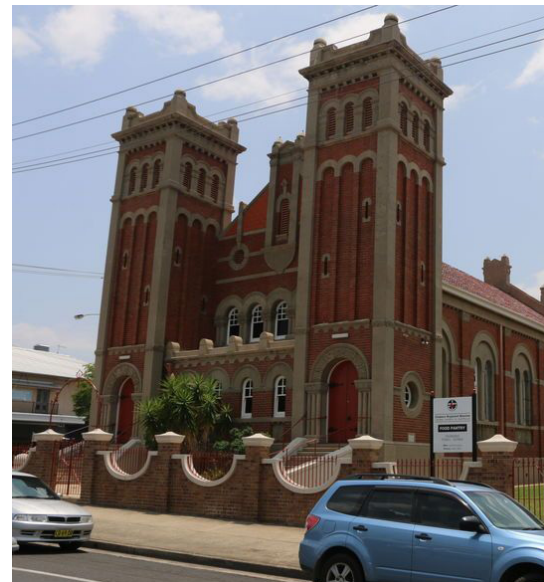
New Beginning

Rev. Denise Savage | Lismore Regional Uniting Church

It's September 2024. Sitting in a newly renovated space for worship, post "the big one", or "the flood", is a community ready. They are ready for a new beginning. The smell of fresh paint and carpet. The sense of hope rising in what might be. A new ministry team being prepared for, and a sense of needing to celebrate the journey that has been undertaken. The work of the buildings is not yet complete, but as is reflected in other areas of life for Lismore Region UC, there is a lot of rebuilding as a work in progress. A coming together of five worship spaces, governance strengthening, missional dreaming and connecting. A refining of the way things have been. A looking ahead not just for survival, but because there is an underlying call to be God's people in this place and time.

If you come to any of the communities of the Lismore Region UC you could be entering an Op Shop, you could be sitting on a cement slab after worship surrounded by paddocks looking at interesting items up for grabs in a Pop Up Op Shop. You could be playing board games to help support a local family raising funds for surgery only done overseas for a young boy with a particular health challenge. You could be singing under trees to welcome in the Easter Story of resurrection while looking out across the valleys below as the sun rises. You could be praying with a prayer partner in a home. You could be wrestling with other leaders about how best to bring in structures that help to support the function that need to be carried out. You could laughing and sharing stories in an office with one of the new ministry team, or sharing something of a life story. You could be attending a funeral for a local long time community contributor. Or helping to lift and return furniture as a cyclone takes its time to decide to make landfall.

With a sense of openness to what God might have in mind next, there is room for possibilities to be tried and tested. For community life to be lifted into a different space and way of being church. To hold faith in new and fresh ways as the long story of God present to the world continues to be noticed - whether in a country paddock or city precinct.





Saltbush Gathering Armidale

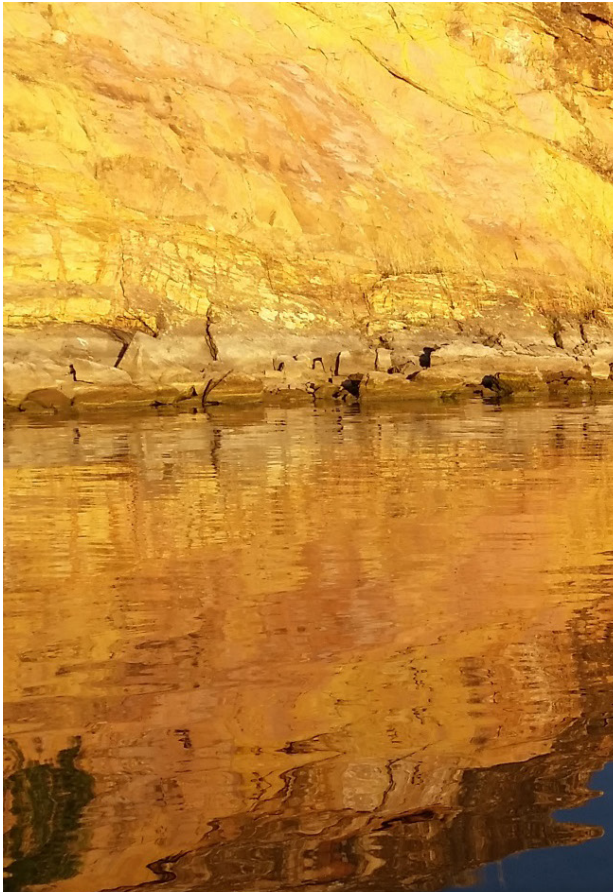
Saturday 22nd November | 9.30am
Armidale Uniting Church

Our Saltbush Gatherings are for anyone who seeks a time of Christian community, conversation, hospitality and the opportunity to learn more about Saltbush itself.

For more information and to register go to our website:

saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au

and look under Events.



Saltbush Gathering Lake Cargelligo

Saturday 28th February | 9.30am
Lake Cargelligo Uniting Church

This time in the Riverina, we welcome anyone from across the land for our day of Christian community together.

You can register now, with more information to follow.

Go to our website:

saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au

and look under Events



I'm sitting this one out

Rev. Jeff Savage | Lismore Regional Uniting Church

Through all-time, humanity has placed expectations on their Lord and God. Christ Jesus, God with us, the incarnate one, is likewise destined for a life of expectations. In the Gospel of Mark chapter 7 Jesus is confronted by expectation after expectation.

Mark 7 starts with expectations and conflict over ceremonial handwashing. "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition?". Jesus holds a mirror up to his detractors, showing that their expectations are capricious.

To withdraw from the crowd, Jesus went into a house. Maybe he is momentarily free of energy draining expectations of others. Alas, the disciples now expect dialogue regarding that which he has just made clear to the Pharisees and religious leaders.

Once again on the move, Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre, and the scriptures tell us that he didn't want anyone to know in which house he was staying. Yet news of Jesus travels ahead, as does the energy, momentum and expectations. For Jesus, the allure of the place without people and their expectations is little more than a mirage. The Lord arrives, and his reputation has preceded him. A woman comes to him and falls at his feet. Her belief was that Jesus would set her daughter free from a Spirit that had control of her. Without a lengthy unpacking of this narrative, Jesus crosses cultural and race boundaries, even holding them up as a strawman, which she deconstructs, and in doing so, meets God's grace and healing power.

It is hard to withdraw from the expectations of others without seeming rude, disinterested, or appearing to 'not be fully invested' in the ministry. To decline an invitation to assist someone usually comes with some internal conflict or lament.

A short story of when I declined an invitation to visit someone dying in hospital. What?! The internal conflict of not meeting the expectations of others still sits with me from this incident. I guess one of the reasons it still sits with me, is it challenged my own internal expectations of self.



The day started the same as nearly any other Saturday. We did some housework and played games with our 2-year-old. A fairly normal day, until my wife started having contractions. With all our expectations packed into the car, and an excited nearly 2-year-old, we headed the 20 minutes into town, dropping said 2-year-old off at a friend's house, and making our way to the hospital.

Somewhere in the early hours of Sunday morning, our family of three, became four. After the joy of bathing our new baby and seeing my wife and new baby were all well and ready for rest, I headed for home. Arriving home just before 4.00am, I made the obligatory (or I could say expectational) phone calls and by 4.20am was climbing into bed. Rest finally.

Around 4.45am the phone rang. Fearing the worst I climbed out of bed to try and make sense of the voice on the other end. "This is..... from the Bundaberg base hospital. Sorry to ring you at this hour but would you be able to come up as soon as possible because we have patient who is dying." As I came to my senses, and stopped expecting the worst, it became clear. As I had just welcomed my new daughter, taking their first breaths, I was being asked to come and journey with another who was about to take their last breaths. Somehow the prospect



Jan Brueghel the Elder
1596

Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee.

... it is
important
to find quiet
or separate
spaces for
spiritual rest
and renewal...

of a 20-minute drive, to then share sacred space with another as they died, when I had been awake for around 22 hours, and just got home from the hospital and birth of my daughter, seemed an expectation that was one step more than my very being could embrace- even with whatever energy could be produced by adrenalin or the weight of expectation from the hospital.

In ministry; every day, sermon, request, visit, meeting, music choice, and more, is met by the expectation of others. Sometimes these are named, sometimes displayed, sometimes they give rise to words, sometimes actions or inaction. Most of these expectations are just part of the rub of life. But when expectations become overwhelming, what do we do and where do we turn? As Christian we can easily justify that we need to be present for people or run a script in our head that brings further expectations, but how do we find that place, like we see Jesus trying to do in Mark chapter 7, where we are at least momentarily free of expectations.

The only way of withdrawing from expectations is to withdraw from people and to say a firm "No more". In Mark's gospel Jesus seeks out 'desolate' or 'solitary' places to pray either by himself or with his disciples. Sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Like Jesus, it is important to find quiet or separate spaces for spiritual rest and renewal, and in Mark 1: 35, Jesus even gets up before dawn to do so. For the times when you can't escape the crowds or the storm, may you learn to be like Jesus in Mark 4: 38 – in the boat, in the storm, sleeping on a cushion. May you find the time which you need, for your own wellbeing, where expectations don't swamp you. Even if it is a few minutes asleep on a cushion and let the storms and squalls do their thing around you. It is okay to say, "I'm sitting this one out".





Psalms Down-under

Dame Joy Cowley | Author

Worship

We step out of our every day selves
and into this cathedral
of sky and earth and sea
where all the parables of life
are played out in their seasons
and all the seasons held as one
in the love of God.

Everything here is holy in its being.
Every fern, tree, rock, drop of sea,
exists as a prayer of thanksgiving,
and together they speak a chapter
in the gospel of wonder
which is laid upon our lives.

Eagerly our hearts lean forward,
to listen to the praise of tree ferns
echoing in the still water,
and to see the shimmering of the divine
behind the surface of each leaf.

Look! It is everywhere!
The love of the creator glowing
in mountains and in ocean,
in pebble and stem, fish and bird,
and us! Yes, yes! The light of God in us!

For we too, are sacred.
We too, are named holy.
And the meaning of our lives
is thanksgiving.





News from Saltbush

Rev. Mark Faulkner | Saltbush Ministry Team Leader

Over this year our Saltbush team have drawn together our Saltbush Gatherings in Goulburn, Singleton, Junee and Armidale. We've held our Saltbush Lay Leader's Retreat in Galong with a wonderfully diverse group of people from the north to the south of NSW. We've visited a multitude of places including Merimbula, Narromine, Griffith, Junee, Rylstone, Gunnedah, Quirindi, Werris Creek, Singleton, Guyra, Wellington, Parkes and Mullumbimby and we are mindful of all our rural



congregations as part of our weekly life as a team. We've met with lay leaders each week for our Monday morning Lectionary Café along with our other evening cafés in Lent, winter and Advent. We've published each week our Word Around the Bush which still daunts each of us as we write, record, edit and then post our amateur videos online as a way of supporting lay leaders and speaking into our rural Christian communities. We've published our book of seven conversations,



Salt in the Wound; A Journey with Jacob, alongside our annual three issues of Ruminations with the themes of "Lost", "Bush", and now "Expectations".

In all these places and ways, it is the people the Saltbush team meet across the land and share this faith journey with who give us encouragement and inspiration. As we meet people in the places of gathering, in our online communities, through weekly contact of phone calls and emails and visits, as a team we are thankful for those who are willing to open themselves to explore faith and life alongside us, acknowledging that the church community of the present future will be unlike the practices and the structures of the past that are so often clung to.

From the Saltbush Team, Natasha, Tim and myself, we look forward to sharing in genuine Christian community with you in 2026 and opening ourselves to the God of the unexpected and unimaginable.

Peace to you all.

Mark .

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

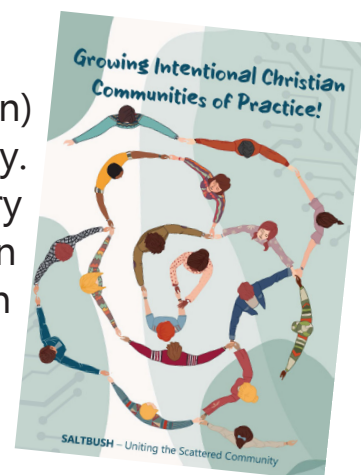
This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to have some discussion around who you are, how you gather and how you live out your faith. Talking about Salt is five difficult conversations for congregations and can also be used to shape a life and witness discussion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

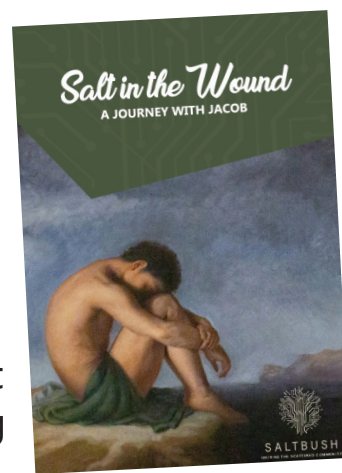
Joining God in the Great Unravelling by Alan J. Roxburgh.

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**.

Thanks for your donations to Saltbush!

Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage congregations and people in scattered communities of faith.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

Bank: Uniting Financial Services
Account Name: UCA Synod Office - Saltbush Project
BSB: 634-634
Account Number: 100047049

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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.

Editors: Mark Faulkner
Tim Jensen
Natasha He
Monique Potter

Uniting the Scattered Community

PO Box 648 Canberra City, 2601

0477 720 151

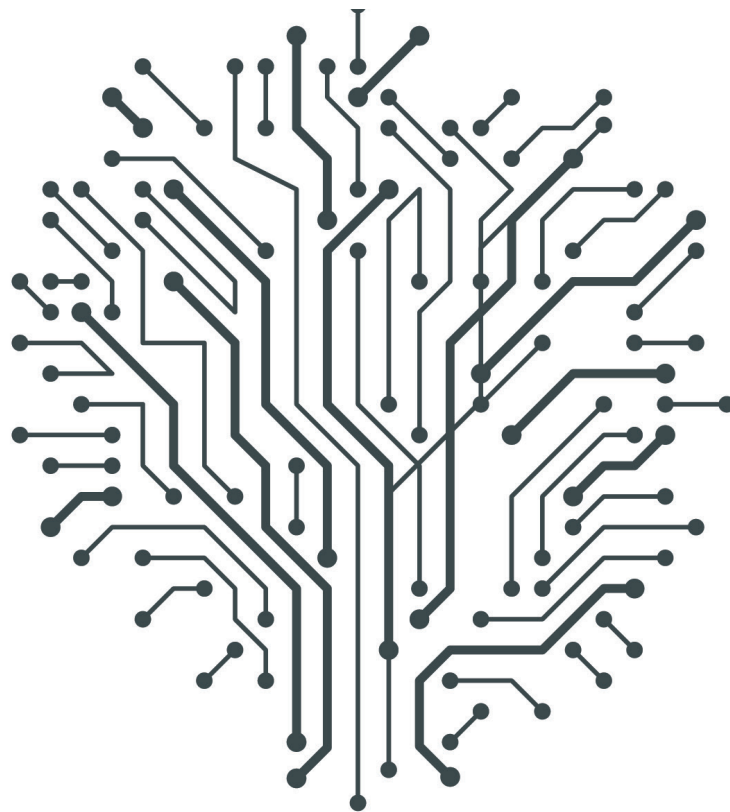
saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au

<https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/>



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UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY