

3rd November 2019

Living out our baptism

I have a friend who earlier this week flew to New York to run in the New York marathon. Can you imagine anything sillier than that? I don't get it. That takes an enormous amount of preparation and fortitude to get the diet right, to get the training right, to do the training. For someone who already has a significant ministry responsibility it means getting up ridiculously early and flogging his body get it right to run a stupidly long race. I mean to say, running from the front door to the letter box and back on a wet day is enough to exhaust me.

Then this morning's *Thought for the Day* popped up: *'I might wake up early and go running. I might also wake up and win the lottery. The odds are about the same.'* That was enough to persuade me not to do either! Rather I got up at a respectable hour, ate breakfast, walked to my car, drove to the church office, and proceeded to write this note at my desk.

Yet the apostle Paul likened living the Christian life, being a follower of Jesus, with the life of an endurance athlete. He likened it to running the race before us, not turning back, not giving up, but persevering to the end.



It was a delight Tuesday morning to meet up with Randall Prior again. Randall was the head of our theological college. But he insists he did not retire. He simply stepped back from the formal paid dimension. He continues to live out his baptism. He is still very active in theological research and teaching. He has just written a new book on contextual theology. He is clear in his mind that a Christian never 'retires'. We accept our vocation given us in baptism and are called to live it out until we cross the finish line of life.

There is a term used in relation to the later years of life that has parallels to the metaphor of the endurance runner. It is the concept of 'finishing well'. It delights me to see disciples of Christ around me continuing to live out their discipleship every day of their life into latter years, some of them into their 80s and 90s. One such lady who died earlier this year in the hours prior to her death was, from her hospital bed, still encouraging young people, still organising her family and still actively contemplating faith and life.

These kinds of people inspire me to keep the faith, to finish well the calling God has called me to. And while I look forward to retirement whenever that happens I know that it cannot be a time to stop being who I am called to be. While it might mean relinquishing some particular responsibilities we never 'retire' from the life of faith and discipleship.

I still don't think I will buy a lottery ticket. And I'm not about to start running marathons.

10th November 2019

U Ethical

Who do you invest your precious capital with? This is an important question for Christians, particularly at a time when corporate ethics have been under the spotlight, globally and domestically – especially our banking sector. I hope it is important to you to be investing in an ethical corporation? It has been for Sue and I as we have invested in our future – our own, and that of our world.

Are you aware that the Uniting Church Synod has such an institution as part of our life? Formerly known as UC Funds Management, it changed its name this year to Uniting Ethical (U Ethical) as part of revisioning its operation. The work of U Ethical is something the church is very proud of. And it offers all of us a good place to invest our money, offering a range of products that caters for varying investment objectives and risk appetites. Sue and I are proud to invest in such a place.

U Ethical is an investment manager with a difference. Since inception, it has worked to create a better world by investing with purpose. Today, U Ethical is one of the largest ethical investment managers in Australia, with \$1.2 billion in funds under management. Unlike the majority of ethical managers, U Ethical is a not-for-profit social enterprise. It provides a significant grant to the Synod enabling our support of ministries and mission across the church.

U Ethical is one of the few investment businesses in Australia to be certified as a B Corporation. B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public

transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. The Church is proud that U Ethical is amongst the top 10% of B Corps globally in the Overall and Community categories.

It is an active investor. It adopts clear positions on important ethical issues and doesn't shy away from holding companies to account. This includes divesting or excluding companies from its portfolios on ethical grounds if it's considered necessary. The UN Sustainable Development Goals provides the framework for assessing and measuring the impact of their investment strategy.

In a climate of historically low interest rates and considerable uncertainty in financial markets, they have maintained competitive investment performance. I would commend them to you. They may be contacted at <https://www.uethical.com/> or by phone on 9251 5450.



17th November 2019

Everything in Common program

I'm sure I don't need to remind you ... and perhaps you'd prefer I didn't remind you ... but ... Christmas isn't far away!

That strikes terror in me at this time every year, as much as I love the story we celebrate in the Christmas season. But there is so much that goes with it in our contemporary society. For me that involves preparation of additional special carols events and other services. Then there is the expectation of exchanging gifts. And no doubt our minds have already turned to the question of what to purchase for whom.

That's all very nice. But I do wonder, as disciples of Jesus, if our gift giving should perhaps be extended beyond the arena of an exchange of gifts. That is, should we perhaps be planning to give gifts to people that we would not expect to return our gesture? Should the return on our gift be nothing more than the joy of having given to someone who can't afford it? Can we perhaps expand our thinking to give to projects that transform the life of a whole village all year round, and perhaps transform a family's economic reality for a lifetime?

After all, God's greatest gift to us, to the whole cosmos, was not given out of any expectation that we would repay the value of that gift. It was a free gift. It was a costly gift. But it was a gift that has transformed the world.

Sue and I have for some years not exchanged gifts at Christmas. Rather we delight in purchasing pigs and toilets and chickens and wells of safe water ... for people in places like Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, and the like. We give to each other in all sorts of ways all year round. We enjoy celebrating Christmas with each other, with our family and with the church. And it gives us a great sense of joy to know that at Christmas we are making a contribution to other people, to whole villages, that will literally change their lives.

I invite you to consider doing the same through UnitingWorld's *Everything In Common* program. You can do that online at <https://everythingincommon.com.au> Through partnering with our sister churches on the ground in these neighbouring countries, there is virtually no management costs. That means maximum bang-for-our-bucks in the gifts we give.



“Church membership is the church’s mutually understood responsibility for one another’s discipleship, both individually and collectively.”

I’ve been thinking about Church membership. That’s probably because we are engaging the required regular review of our membership rolls. But I am firmly convinced that attention to membership rolls is a very pastoral function.

This definition (above) reminds us that we are each responsible for each other’s discipleship. The idea of an individual Christian independent of the body of believers is nonsensical. The apostle Paul regularly used the metaphor of a body to describe the interrelated nature of what we call the church – the family of people who endeavour to follow the way of Christ. Central to this metaphor is the idea that we need each other.

Doing a bit of Googling about church rolls, I was stunned to discover so many churches lamenting the bloated nature of their rolls, often with numerous long-deceased people listed. There is lots of talk about how they can prune them. Understandably they want a truer picture of who is part of their church. We want a true picture of who we are too.

Just as important for me in our present process, is to encourage people regularly participating in our worship and other activities to consider taking the step towards ‘membership’. That is to say, I am every bit as interested in adding people to the rolls of St. Andrew’s as I am in removing them. Over the next few months we will be enquiring of those we have lost contact with as to their intentions re participation in the life of our church, but we will also be encouraging those in our number who have not become confirmed members to consider that. Membership carries both privileges and responsibilities.

This will be a slow process. If you are in that category you might want to initiate the conversation with me/us.

Of course, in the Uniting Church, everyone is welcome to attend worship, receive the sacraments, and enjoy the fellowship of the church. None of these things is restricted to ‘members’ per se. The rite of Confirmation within the Uniting Church makes opportunity for those participating to make: “acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, determination to follow him in daily life, intention to participate actively in the fellowship of the Church and to support its work and resolution to seek the extension of the reign of God in human society”. That is our aspiration for all who become part of our number.



I’m looking forward to those conversations.
