



## ADDRESS TO UNITING CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### *INTRODUCTION*

I thank the Uniting Church Historical Society for asking me to give this talk. I also want to acknowledge the help I have been given by Moira Bryant of the Camden Theological Library in assisting me to access the archives of the antecedent churches of the Uniting Church. As a former minister of the Congregational Church, which figures least in my talk, I had to try and understand what had happened in the other two churches. Because the Uniting Church Board for Social Responsibility had emerged largely out of the Methodist Department of Christian Citizenship, a lot of its heritage had flowed into the new body. That was not the case with the Presbyterian Social Service Department, and that is where I had to do the most work. Bill Ives' suggestion that I read all the Blue Book reports, although daunting at first, turned out to be a very illuminating exercise.

Although I originally balked at the suggestion by Robert Evans that I should traverse the era from the Second World War to the present, I think in retrospect that he made a good starting point for me. Prior to the Second World War, most of the social responsibility work of the churches was confined to separate institutions, eg, the War Memorial Hospital, Scottish Hospital, Queen Victoria Hospital, Burnside, etc. with some work on current social issues, mostly of the moralistic type. It is after the Second World War that the denominational departments of Social Services [and that was also the original name of the Methodist organisation, although it added the words "and Public Questions] started to take shape. In the Methodist Conference minutes of 1943 it is stated that: "That the Public Questions Committee be regarded as a Department in view of the ever-increasing demands for a vigorous policy and co-ordinated action in confronting the present and post-war social and economic problems". A Committee of Conference was also established to form a budget for the new Department, but that didn't happen in the short term. Likewise the Presbyterian social service department arose around the Second World War period.

Gradually Social Service Directors were appointed, part time at first, and then full time. It is worth noting, that taking the Methodist line, from the appointment of Rev. Bill Hobbin in 1945, there have been four Directors until the end of 2012 when I retire. I have served longest, followed by Hobbin, then Rev. Gordon Trickett, and the shortest period was that of Rev. Dick Udy. Not dissimilar to Wesley Mission, where between Frank Rayward, Alan Walker and Gordon Moyes, an even longer period was covered. And I add, that Rev. Doug Cole served 18 years as the Head of Social Services in the Presbyterian Church. It does tell us that people had strong commitment and liked what they were doing.

## *DENOMINATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENTS*

When Bill Hobbin was appointed as Director of Social Services in the Methodist Church in 1948, he had already cut his teeth with radical social action in the 1930's. I am indebted here to the account provided by Win Ward in her book "Men Ahead of their Time" where she devotes a chapter to Hobbin. She relates how his campaigns in the 1930's against slum housing led him to target the slum landlords, many of whom lived in the affluent suburb of Bellevue Hill. She writes: "Hobbin and others would set up loud speakers in the streets of Bellevue Hill and inform residents of the slum situation. While they were speaking, other Legion members [a group that Hobbin had founded] would go to a local telephone booth and ask police to move the speakers. In this way they were assured of publicity". Whatever contribution I have made to stir the pot in my time has been very paltry in comparison to the achievements of Bill Hobbin. The other story about Bill Hobbin that tells something about him is that when he was posted as Methodist Minister to the Church in Junee in 1940 he rapidly became involved in community affairs. Win Ward relates that within six months of his arrival he nominated as alderman on the Council, was elected with an 89.5% majority and was then elected mayor, a position he held until he left Junee.

In the Presbyterian Church the Social Services department emerged from the work of the inner city missions. The bulk of the work done there was undertaken by Presbyterian deaconesses, and it also encompassed the aged care work at the Pitt Wood home in Ashfield which housed elderly women, the St. Andrews Boys Home at Manly which commenced in 1943, as well as hospital and court chaplains. These Presbyterian inner city missions were akin to the Methodist Missions which were located at Leichhardt, Paddington, Balmain as well as the Central Methodist Mission. Bill Hobbin was the Superintendent of the Balmain Mission when he was originally appointed Director of Social Services and for a time held those two positions concurrently. The same was true in regard to Rev. Doug Cole who was Presbyterian Minister at Glebe as well as Director of Social Services. Whilst the Presbyterian Social Service Department incorporated the work of the Metropolitan Missions [as they were known], in the Methodist tradition the Social Service Department operated alongside the Methodist Missions, and to a degree duplicated them by establishing its own social service activities such as landra at Grenfell and Heighway House at Thornleigh. Despite the work of the Methodist Missions it was clear, even in the Methodist Church, that people wanted social service activities which were developed by the denominational administration. In other words, something everyone participated in.

The Congregational Church, with no denominational structure to speak of, had no denominational department in the way that Presbyterians and Methodists had. However, it is worth noting the contribution made, for example, by Rev. Alex Campbell, who was the President of the Sydney City Mission from 1945 to 1963 while he was minister of the Killara Congregational Church. In the Mission's history he is quoted as saying that the Mission didn't say to the down and out 'God help you' but 'in the name of God can we help you'.

## *SOCIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES*

The connection between the work in social justice issues and the work of social services is one of the themes over the years. As we have seen in Methodism Bill Hobbin was the Director of Social Services “and Public Questions”. In the 1960’s he had the name changed to Department of Christian Citizenship which encompassed both aspects of social responsibility. This tradition was strongly continued by Rev. Gordon Trickett and of the few instructions he gave me in 1985 when he retired the main one was “never let them separate social justice and community services”. In the Presbyterian Church, the Social Services Department looked after community services whilst the Church Life and Work committee addressed social justice, or more commonly known in that day as “public questions”. Later the Church Life and Work committee changed its name to the Church and Nation Committee. The Presbyterians also had some other committees, such as the Christian Social Order Committee, and some were conservative and some more radical.

The relationship between social services and social justice remains a live issue in the Uniting Church. During my time a survey of the separate aged care boards revealed that they did not want to be in the same arm of the Church as the social justice advocates, and in 1999 they made a concerted push to have their own Board of Aged Care in the Synod, separate from the Board for Social Responsibility. I am pleased to say that they failed in that attempt, partly because when their motion to the Synod was declared invalid by the Moderator, they challenged his ruling, the Synod split 200 votes on each side on the question, and the Moderator, who was Bruce Irving, calmly declared that he intended to exercise his casting vote in favour of his own ruling! There are people in the Church today who want to take the responsibility for social justice away from UnitingCare and put it in the Board of Mission and Education. Their argument, which is the traditional one, is that social service operators such as UnitingCare are tainted by their receipt of Government funds and therefore cannot speak unambiguously on social justice matters. Attempts on my part to get the Assembly to combine Uniting Justice and UnitingCare Australia several years ago, foundered on this argument. My counter to that, and I hope that I am speaking for Gordon Trickett and Bill Hobbin is that our provision of practical social services gives us the credibility we need when speaking on issues in our society. Our work last year on the Same Sex Adoption Bill is an example of this. A large number of speakers in the NSW Parliament quoted the letter I wrote largely because as an organisation providing foster care, we had credibility on the subject. Moreover, we should look at the St. Vincent de Paul Society, a social service provider whose National Director, John Falzon, is a prominent advocate of social justice. Also, I could give the example of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

In regard to social justice issues, the Presbyterian lineage gives examples of significantly radical thinking, especially emerging during the 1960’s. When you move from the 1940’s through the 1950’s and into the 1960’s you can see the original emphasis on temperance, anti-state aid, the moral tone of the press, and sabbatarianism gradually shifting into issues such as nuclear weapons, contraception, and sexuality. In 1953 the Presbyterian Assembly urged all its members to avoid the term “white Australia” and in 1965 the Convenor of Church Life and Work reported that he had attended the Australian Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament and that he had found “there was no dominance by Community Red groups nor the exclusion of minority opinions”. In 1967 the same Committee reported that the Assembly should support the Wolfenden report in the UK which had recommended that homosexual behaviour

between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence. It took the State of NSW 17 more years to pass legislation to that effect in 1984. And when it did and it was supported by Rev. Gordon Trickett he was vilified for his views. Indeed, in his obituary published earlier this year, Gordon's son said that his father had received death threats because of his views. To illustrate how times and cultures do change, however, it is worth noting that in 1950 Bill Hobbin issued a press release to say that "the Methodist Church was alarmed at the growth of homosexuality" and that "the church must take up the challenge on behalf of these poor unfortunates"! To balance the record, it is worth noting that in the same year Mr. Hobbin also issued a statement attacking the then Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell for his support of the White Australia Policy, and said that "Mr. Calwell's latest attack on the clergy hits an all time peak in Calwellian-infantile absurdity"!

During my time this work a large amount of the specialist work on social justice issues was undertaken by Rev. Ann Wansbrough who served 22 years from 1985 to 2007 and she made a considerable impact, notably in the 1993 Federal elections when her paper on community focus versus individualism did considerable damage to the electoral fortunes of Dr. John Hewson. The recent prominence of UnitingCare Australia which has carriage of welfare issues at a national level and of Uniting Justice, the arm of the National Assembly responsible for national social justice issues, has narrowed the scope for a Synod/State based arm of the Church. Nevertheless the establishment of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre in Kings Cross in 2001 was a very good example of social service provision blending into a social justice statement. This had also occurred earlier when the Board for Social Responsibility had established and funded its own tenancy advice service in response to the State Government's decision to cease funding a network of such services across the State. Our carrying the candle for one service, eventually led to the re-establishment of the network of tenancy advice services.

### *THE EXPANSION INTO AGED CARE*

While there were examples of aged care in the Methodist Central Mission and with Pitt Wood and David Gillies House in the Presbyterian Church, the real boost to activities in this area came when the Menzies Government responded to the housing needs of elderly persons by passing the Aged Persons Homes Act in 1954. This provided subsidies for the building of independent living units for aged persons with a pound for pound subsidy system. The subsidy was later increased to two pounds for one. The last units to be built under this scheme were finished in about 1982. In its 1955 report to the Assembly the Presbyterian Social Service Department described this new Act as presenting "an opportunity not to be missed for extending the accommodation at Pitt Wood". However, it took some years before this movement really got into its stride. It was not until 1965 that the Methodist Conference established a Homes and Institutions Advisory Committee to approve applications from circuits and parish missions for the establishment of aged care proposals. This Committee was separate from the Social Service Department. By 1974 this Committee was reporting that it was examining 15 separate proposals for developing aged care centres. In the Congregational Church, the Homes Trust was established in this period and the Mayflower Aged Care centres at Bondi, Parramatta, and Gerringong were commenced. In 1977 under the leadership of Rev. Gordon Trickett the separation between the Department of Christian Citizenship and the Homes and Institutions Advisory Committee was ended and the latter committee, now renamed the Assessments Committee, was made part of the new Board for Social Responsibility. Developments of aged care continued apace and 1984 saw the

establishment of the Synod Aged Care Agency within the Board for Social Responsibility. This was later replaced in 1999 by Uniting Ministry with the Ageing. In 2003 a decision was taken by the Council of Synod, following a number of serious problems within individual boards of aged care, to bring the aged care work together under the single management of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. The only exception to this today is the aged care work of Wesley Mission which remains separately managed, albeit under the same Approved Provider number as that of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Today, UnitingCare NSW.ACT is one of the largest providers of aged care under the Commonwealth Act. The current focus of UnitingCare Ageing is to expand its work into community care and to thereby shift its preponderance from residential care.

### *PROFESSIONALISM AND DE-INSTITUTIONALISATION*

Growing professionalism can be seen right across the period. Good examples would be Burnside and Unifam. With Burnside we see the gradual reduction of numbers of children being cared for on the North Parramatta campus, as the old system of 30 children in a house with house parents [the woman being an employee with her husband merely living on site] gradually gives way to smaller number of children on site, the establishment of homes in the suburbs and the growth of foster care. In 1944 there were 366 children on site at North Parramatta. Today there are none. The type of children has changed. Today most of the children who were there in 1944 would still be living with their families. In 1954 when there were 320 children on site, 270 of them were being supported financially by their parents who paid an average of 15 pounds, 8 shillings a week for Burnside to look after their children. In 1962 when it accommodated 191 children Burnside appointed its first social worker. At the same time it removed the roller shutters from the homes [children previously slept in the open air] and replaced them with proper windows and curtains. The Burnside report of 1963 states that they had by then appointed 2 social workers who were undertaking "casework". In 1966 the Board reported that the social workers [and there are now 3] provided an "invaluable service" and were "responsible for screening all applications for children to be admitted".

The same story, although of more recent note, occurs with Unifam which originated in the Methodist Church. In 1986 when I arrived its only office was one room in Pilgrim House, next to the Pitt Street Church. Rev. Eric Stevenson was the Director who was assisted by a couple of part-time staff, and the counsellors were all volunteers who had undertaken some form of training. When Clive Price was appointed Director he set about professionalising Unifam with paid staff that had recognised professional qualifications and the growth of Unifam is largely due to that reform.

While there are some in the Church who long for the good old days of amateurism, the move to professionalism was both inevitable and necessary. I predict that it will happen in Lifeline over the next few years. To offer services to the community usually requires accreditation of one sort or another, and whether you are receiving Government funding or not, the clients of the services expect professionalism. After all, none of us would expect amateurs to fly Qantas planes and none of us would attend a doctor who didn't have sufficient qualifications.

Along with professionalism comes de-institutionalisation. It was a shock to me to read that in 1968 the Westwood Home in Bowral housed 81 "girls" with disabilities. I was even

more shocked when Dick Udy told me recently that the number had reached 90. This would not be allowed today and, even then, was unsatisfactory institutionalism. During his period as General Secretary of the BSR, Gordon Trickett closed Westwood, as well as the Tahmoor Children's Home [ a Congregational church venture], landra at Grenfell, and Heighway House. Gordon has not got the credit he deserved for this necessary course of action. Westwood was replaced with Supported Living, a program to provide support to people with disabilities living in their own accommodation. Gordon Trickett was ahead of the Richmond Report in NSW which led to the de-institutionalisation of psychiatric hospitals and large homes for the disabled. I am told that Rev. Bill Hobbin was not very happy about Gordon Trickett's decisions, especially in regard to landra. It was in my first year that the St. Andrew's Boys Home at Leppington was closed, again because it no longer provided a suitable model. It has been left to my period to deal with the aftermath of not ending the institutions earlier. The Senate Enquiry which resulted in the Forgotten Australians report dealt with the cases of abuse arising from children's home across Australia and led to the need for organisations to offer public apologies and to adopt policies to deal with complaints from former residents. UnitingCare has done this and in recent years I have dealt with cases from St. Andrews Leppington, Tahmoor Children's Home and Burnside. Some do involve sexual assault and reading the stories of the persons involved is a reminder that the best intentions are not enough. The present day requirements of closer management and supervision were often lacking in the 1960's and 70's.

### *CONSOLIDATION*

Some people would call this centralisation, but I think that consolidation is a better term. It is interesting to note that when it established the Homes and Institutions Committee in 1965 the Methodist Conference gave it the mandate to ensure "that the standards of the Church are maintained in all institutions and to bind them into the total life of the connexion". By 1972 the Department of Christian Citizenship [the name of the Department of Social Services from 1965], under the leadership of Rev. Dick Udy, commented that "the whole social caring program of the church is fragmented at present and the various scattered activities of the Church proceed without clear co-ordinated goals". When the Board for Social Responsibility was established in 1977 it was given in its by laws the power to prevent any venture in community services going ahead without its approval. That remains the case today. It is estimated that about 70% of the work of community services today conducted by the Synod are managed by UnitingCare NSW.ACT with the remaining 30% managed by parish missions or congregations. The consolidated strength of UnitingCare NSW.ACT provides a bank of expertise and financial resource which assists the smaller groups in carrying out their work.

The path to consolidation is again seen in the history of Burnside. Rather than drifting away from the mainstream Church, Burnside, by degrees, was brought closer into the Synod orbit. When the then Board of Burnside was dissolved in 1986, the new constitution provided that the General Secretary of the Board for Social Responsibility would be ex officio on the Board. This settled the dispute which had occurred when the Rev. Doug Cole and later the Rev. Gordon Trickett were appointed to the Board. In 1999 a decision was taken that the CEO of Burnside would be appointed by the Board of UnitingCare and not the Burnside Board itself. In 2003 Burnside was made a Service Group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT and its Director reported to the Executive Director of UnitingCare as well as to the Board of Burnside. This coincided with the largest

consolidation of all, which was the amalgamation of aged care under the one management structure. While some were opposed to it [and probably remain so] the argument in favour was overwhelming and the growth since 2003 has vindicated the decision. Maintaining local participation while having the benefits of consolidated management is a tightrope that UnitingCare has to walk. Although the current 9 Boards within UnitingCare present their problems in terms of communication and disputation, they do provide the possibility of wider participation.

One of the concurrent trends has been the decline in membership of the Church. When we had 52 boards of aged care, it required about 500 people to serve on them. The fact is that we simply cannot come up with such a number today. When those boards came to an end in 2003 many board members had served for long periods, often because it was difficult to replace them. The 9 current boards in UnitingCare require about 100 people to serve on them, and while there are always applicants outside the Church, there are fewer and fewer suitable people from the Church. So, in order to maintain a workable governance structure in a church with declining membership, consolidation is simply inevitable. Our colleagues in Queensland, with a much larger organisation than us now have only one Board with members being paid for their service.

### *SOCIAL SERVICE AND EVANGELISM*

Both in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the work of social service emerged out of the inner city missions and congregations. This work was largely undertaken by deaconesses who combined the work of community services with evangelistic outreach. It was not dissimilar to what was done by the Sydney City Mission, later to become merged into Mission Australia, with its Mission Halls and its emphasis on evangelism which later became focused on community services. The work of the deaconesses was a combination of evangelism and social welfare. In the Presbyterian Church responsibility for the Mildred Parker College for training deaconesses lay with the Department of Social Service. For a range of reasons, some practical and some theological, the work centred on providing social and welfare services rather than on evangelism. In her book Win Ward relates the story about Bill Hobbin speaking at a meeting in Tamworth in 1960 as the first National President of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign and a questioner asked: "I am wondering when, as a minister of religion, you do any of God's work?" Hobbin replied: "Doing God's work is what I have been talking about for the past hour".

This issue continues to dog us and it is based on a misunderstanding about Christian mission. At the Synod meeting in 2010, questions were invited from table groups. One question received by UnitingCare asked about how much verbal Christian witness was practised by staff on clients. The word "verbally" was in capital letters, presumably to prevent me from answering by pointing out that service is also witness. As I said at the time, I don't fall for those sorts of trick questions. The fact is that the services provided by UnitingCare are a witness to the love of God and all 7,500 staff of UnitingCare are engaged in God's mission because that is what we have employed them to do.

The concept of social welfare, which was prevalent in the 1920's and 1930's which was that poverty was a result of indolence and lack of industry and could be best addressed by personal conversion, was replaced by a more sociological and economic analysis. People were recognised as being poor because of their lack of money, affordable

housing, adequate healthcare and access to education. This fitted well with the churches concept of entitlement and social justice advocacy.

### *RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH*

Throughout the period from 1945 to the present, the work of social responsibility has always had its controversial edge and has always ruffled feathers in other parts of the Church. Bill Hobbin certainly did, and Gordon Trickett's stand in supporting Neville Wran's 1984 Bill to de-criminalise homosexuality, upset some members of the Church. His closure of Westwood created fierce opposition from the Bowral Church. In earlier days the main issue of contention between the departments of social responsibility and the church members was over stances on social issues, sexuality being an enduring one. In the early 1980's there was controversy because the then Director of Unifam, Rev. Eric Stevenson, said that Unifam was helping couples divorce in a civilised way. Apparently, the mere mention of divorce was unacceptable in some quarters.

In more recent times that has changed. The most controversial issues in the past decade have been the administration of social services, particularly the consolidation of aged care in 2003 and consequent disputes about how the new system should be administered. In 2008 a resolution was passed by the Synod disallowing a decision of the UnitingCare Board to change the scope and role of the Regional Boards within UnitingCare Ageing, and imposing upon us a somewhat tedious consultation process which had some bright moments, but not enough to justify the amount of time that was expended.

When Ted Woodley wrote on of his reports on the administration of UnitingCare, he asked me for some quotes which he could intersperse throughout the pages of his report. One that I submitted to him was "The Church is an important stakeholder of UnitingCare but not as important as our clients and service users". Some people in UnitingCare thought that this was provocative and suggested I withdraw it. I didn't because it is true.

Today the size of UnitingCare seems to be a problem in some parts of the Church. At a national UnitingCare conference a few years ago there was a workshop with the title: "UnitingCare: The Church's mission or the Church's Cash Cow?" Whereas most people in the community would think that UnitingCare was being funded by the Church to undertake its welfare activities, in recent times the reverse has become the case with UnitingCare expected to fund the other parts of the Church. In regard to controversial social issues, the operation of the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre seemed to cause few problems in the Church, and today the more likely criticism is that UnitingCare is not controversial enough. While I acknowledge that UnitingCare is changing and its relationship with the Church will change over time, it still remains the social justice, chaplaincy, and social services arm of the Uniting Church in this Synod and I hope that this talk today will have gone some way to show that we haven't lost sight of past tradition and we are in the same lineage as Departments of Social Service in the past.

**Rev. Harry J. Herbert,  
Executive Director,  
UnitingCare NSW.ACT**