

Seeing a couple of German backpackers in the Central Markets the other day had me remembering my own experience of that particular rite of passage into adulthood. In my case it was backpacking around Europe with Heather - rail passes safely stored with our passports, following the backpackers' "ant trail" with who knows how many thousands of other twenty-somethings, carrying Frommer's house-brick-sized travel guide *Europe on \$20 a Day*. (That's how long ago it was. Last time I looked the current edition was called *Europe on \$85 a Day!*)

The particular thing I was remembering the other day was the almost universal habit of backpackers in 1982 of tearing out the chapter that related to the particular city you were in at the time. It shocked me when I first saw it. I'd grown up in a family that loved books and reading. I learned to respect and appreciate books as objects – we almost revered them at our place. So I was deeply offended by the backpackers' deliberate acts of vandalism (if not sacrilege).

At first, anyway. I soon saw the good sense in what was going on. Why carry around 500 bound pages on the whole of Western Europe all day when you really only need the 20 pages on Antwerp? What's more, most backpackers would then simply leave that chapter behind when they moved on to Brussels or Amsterdam or wherever. No point in carrying it with you. It's just extra weight on your shoulders. In any case, the memories of the sights and experiences of a Belgian port city are carried more effectively in the stories that you swap with other travellers on the next train than in a few printed pages that you won't have the need or inclination to consult again. So as you moved around the continent that massive guide book shrank and shrank until eventually, like your money, there was nothing left of it at all.

Guide books were one thing. *Real* books were another matter – from pulp fiction to classics. My bookish eyes were agog as I watched my backpacking peers apply the same principles to the rest of their reading. Finished novels were left behind in hostels, cafes and trains for other backpackers to pick up and read. I saw incredible shrinking versions of "big books" like *War and Peace* or *Bleak House*. A chapter finished, it was torn out and left behind. I actually saw some European editions that were designed that way – with a perforated line close to the binding to allow pages to be neatly removed once they'd been read. (At least, I think I did. Heather doesn't recall that and I've been known to "remember" things that never happened.) The survival of the printed book didn't matter – the important stuff was already absorbed into the imagination and stories of the backpacker anyway. The vehicle for that entertainment or enrichment, the book itself, was redundant once read. Worse than redundant, it was *heavy*. Of course you got rid of it. It wasn't disrespecting Tolstoy or Dickens, or even Frommer. If anything it was a *mark* of respect. Allow the book to do what it was always meant to do – to initiate

you into the great world of European culture and history. Love it for that. But don't let sentimentality or misplaced principle turn it into a pointless burden.

Backpackers would pick things up too – whatever you needed when you needed it. A presentable shirt and a pair of strides in Paris. A corkscrew in Bordeaux. A sun hat in the Algarve. A scarf in Geneva. And pamphlets, maps and tourist information sheets in every place you stopped along the way. But the principle was always the same. If you need it to really make the most of that stage of the journey, get it – buy it, borrow it, or accept it as a hand me down from a fellow backpacker on their way to the next city. And once you don't need it in *your* pack, get rid of it – leave it behind, give it away, sell it, swap it, or post it home. It's all about the journey, not the various odds and ends that you need at different stages on the journey. It's all about the journey.

The dominant image of life in the Uniting Church has always been "pilgrimage". It's used in the Basis of Union in paragraph 3:

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; 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.

It's all about the journey, not the various odds and ends we need at different stages on the way towards the "promised goal". It's all about the journey

Uniting College for Leadership and Theology isn't a repackaged version of what we've always done in theological education. *It's a fresh start – a fresh departure.* It's not a comment on what we've done in the past. *It's a response to the demands and opportunities of mission today.* It's not the *best* thing that's ever happened in theological education. It's simply the *next* thing that has to happen for the College to serve this pilgrim people on the journey.

But in this way it's also deeply faithful to the generations that went before us. Beginning with the founding of Union College in 1872 the Uniting Church and the denominations that came into union have established fourteen different institutes and colleges devoted to equipping people for ministry and leadership in South Australia¹, the most recent being Parkin Wesley College – initially formed in 1969, then amalgamated with the Lay Education Centre in 1994 and with Coolamon College in 2008. Each had its own story. Each had its distinctive emphasis. Each was a deliberate, strategic response to the missional needs of the church in a particular time and place. Each is

¹ Union College (1972-88) Adelaide Theological College (1888) Parkin College (1911-1969) Prince Alfred College (1884-1922) Way College (1892-1903) Brighton Training Home (1909-1922) Brighton College (1922-1927) Chapman-Alexander Bible Institute (1914-1927) Wesley College (1927-1969) Parkin-Wesley Theological College (1969-1994) St Stephens House (1976-1981) Lay Education Centre (1981-1994) Parkin Wesley College (1994-2009) Coolamon College (1994-2008)

treasured in the memory of the church, and especially in the hearts of those who benefited from its ministry.

And Uniting College for Leadership and Theology is next. Its time is now. It is the leadership development part of the church's response to God's call to mission in South Australia at the start of the 21st century.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

That vision of the church in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is vividly reflected in the Basis of Union. It's not just a helpful metaphor or an uplifting image to be deployed once in awhile. It's not just a good text to preach on when it comes up in the lectionary. No, it's the central organizing theme in the Basis' vision of the church.

It's there in paragraph 3:

God is Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

The church is the body of Christ: a sign, foretaste and instrument of Christ's own ministry, of "that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation." At the heart of its life – in every congregation and faith community – is the constant practice of discerning gifts among the members and encouraging and equipping people to use those gifts in building up the body of Christ for mission.

It's even more in-your-face in paragraph 13:

The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ... *[The Uniting Church will] provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission.*

And now, at the start of the 21st century, we're ready to really be that body of Christ – a community constituted by the Spirit with as many gifts as we have members, and with a corresponding service for every gift.

So what kind of a College does the church need to help it "provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them" and to "order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission"?

At Uniting College we begin by asking to hear what God is calling you to be and do – the gifts you've been given, the experience and skills you've

acquired, the potential you've yet to realize, the passion that brings you to life as a follower of Jesus. We've put aside a "one size fits all" approach to education to become the kind of College that suits a church in which each person is called to particular service of Jesus Christ.

Our role is to enable people to be the Christian disciples and missional leaders that God is calling them to be. That might involve someone taking a course we already offer, or another person having a new course created for him or her. It might mean connecting someone with a mentor who shares her passion and is already effective in ministry. It means helping people find places to explore and express your call through serving in ministry – learning on-the-job.

Our goal is to develop effective leaders for a healthy, missional church, who are

- Passionate
- Christ-centred
- Highly skilled
- Mission oriented practitioners

Uniting College is being organized to serve that goal.

These leaders will include lay people as well as ordained ministers, teams as well as individuals, people who do most of their learning on the job as well as people who do most of their learning in the classroom or the library.

These leaders will include young adults looking for a significant "gap year" experience in discipleship and community. They include experienced ministers seeking to develop their leadership further or to transition into the next phase of their ministries.

The College is identifying an extensive adjunct faculty of practitioners – Ministers and lay leaders – who are proven as effective leaders, who are skilled in their disciplines of ministry and theology, and who have a passion for mentoring and teaching the emerging generation of Uniting Church leaders. We are placing oversight of the personal development and formation of ordination candidates in the hands of panels of excellent ministry practitioners. Once the privilege of the academic faculty, many more ministers and lay leaders will now be directly involved in that exciting, humbling process of journeying with men and women who are responding to a call to ministry of the Word or ministry of Deacon – a call which has derailed the lives they were leading and set them in a new direction.

Uniting College will create opportunities for people to become part of a broad community of peers and mentors who are committed to enabling the church to be the best it can be in mission today, and to helping them be the best they can be as Christian disciples and missional leaders.

Don't worry, we're not building an empire. We're just tearing the next chapter out of our Frommer. While it's useful, Uniting College for Leadership and Theology will be folded there in your back pocket where it belongs. For you

are a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal...and for the next part of your journey, this is your College.