

OBITUARIES

REV. LETTIE ELLEN ABRAHAM

6 March, 1928 – 7 March, 2014

Placements within NSW; 01/10/1993 - 1996 Georgian Villages - Northside; 01/11/1998
Permanently Retired

REV. DR ROBERT JAMES BROWN

Deceased 19 July, 2013

Bob grew up at Oatley, trained at Leigh College in the early 1970's and served in his 1st Methodist Circuit/UC Parish from 1975 – 1980 at Hurstville, before moving to Victoria where he had a number of Placements from 1981 – 2011. He had his 67th birthday in early July. The Rev Dr Bob Brown died unexpectedly, late last week. Bob retired from the Churchill parish in August 2011 and moved to Box Hill. He was an active member at Manningham.

REV. MAXWELL OSBORNE FOX

25 June, 1916 – 20 January, 2014

Maxwell Osborne Fox was born 25 June 1916 at Fairfield Queensland, the son of Rev Albert Osborne Fox and Bertha Amy Fox. He died on 20 January 2014.

Max was one of five children, three of whom followed their father into the ministry. Having had to leave school early because of the depression, Max returned to studies when the family moved to Sydney and entered theological training with the Presbyterian Church aged 20. At the conclusion of 6 years of studies he was attached to Ermington, Asquith and West Strathfield followed by Lake Macquarie where he was a Home Missioner. He married the love of his life, Eila (Bonnie), in 1943 and together they had four children.

Max was ordained at Bangalow in 1943, where he ministered until 1948, then in Dubbo (1948-53) and Balmain (1953-60). Whilst in Balmain, Max became involved in showing people in congregations how they could be missionary evangelists to people right outside their own doors. In 1960 he was appointed Supervisor of Lay Evangelism with the Stewardship Department based in the Assembly Building in Sydney, a position he held for 10 years. Returning to Parish ministry Max served at Miranda and Thirroul until retirement, when he continued to minister in a variety of churches in the Illawarra region.

Max worked hard for church union. He wrote the Song of Union, a hymn for the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia. Max Fox sang loud and joyously, he knew how to lead a song, so that others would also sing loud and joyously.

Max had been actively involved with the Rev Gordon Powell and others in the Billy Graham Crusades. He knew the well-known evangelist personally and was clearly passionate about winning people for Christ. But great crowds and public appeals was not quite the Reformed or Presbyterian approach which is less emotional and more intellectual. That's why Max accepted an appointment for 10 years when he pioneered Lay Evangelism in the NSW Church. The job involved much travelling, all over Australia, and it is estimated that some 10,350 people came to Christ during this period as a direct consequence of Max's ministry which trained and encouraged lay evangelism.

He would go personally to parishes, get the minister to prepare lists of people whom he thought could be approached to commit themselves to Jesus Christ and become Church members, and with them a list of lapsed members who might re-dedicate themselves. Then he would prepare a group of elders and other committed members to go out two by two to talk matters of faith with them. This form of evangelism was most effective. In parish after parish large numbers of people were brought into the fold of the Church and confirmed, not only that, but the lay evangelists were themselves re-vitalized and strengthened in their faith.

Max worked in coastal communities, rural centres, city slums, and middle class parishes. He was as much involved with ageing populations, as he was with young people. Max was an excellent teacher, he taught others to teach, and his last work, his book *Sharing Faith*, was the consolidation of all his knowledge, not just a history, but a practical guide of teaching programs. He said some day someone would find these and take up the work again.

In 2013, Max Fox was honoured by the church for 70 years faithful service. In his 80s he went back to university in the United States, studied and received a Certificate in Advanced Pastoral Studies from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 2012. For 70 years of marriage he received tributes from the Queen, Prime Minister and the Governor General, all of whom were amazed that he had managed to stay married for that long.

NEVILLE GUTHREY

5 June, 1924 – 3 January, 2014

Neville Charles Guthrey came into this world on 5th June, 1924 the third child of Charles and Eliza Guthrey.

His family was very involved in the Bega Methodist Church and, he likewise. In addition to youth activities and the like at 20 years of age he became superintendent of the Sunday school.

Around 1959 Neville approached the Church offering to be what was titled a Home Missionary and this led to appointment to Rylstone in Central NSW. He had nothing more than a Local Preachers Certificate and the only instruction from the Home Mission Department was 'be very careful to see the decree absolute' before conducting the marriage of a divorced person.

In January 1965 Neville was appointed to Terrigal in the Gosford Circuit on what was termed probation and included additional exams.

On 16th October, 1966 having met all requirements he was ordained.

After two years in Terrigal there were placements in Narooma for four years, Yass for five, Cootamundra for seven and finally Wentworthville in Sydney for just over five.

A Pastoral Ministry.

Neville always put a priority on visiting. Both in the crisis times and systematic pastoral visiting. For him this was the heart of a servant ministry.

A Creative Ministry

Neville was at his most enlivened in trying different things to connect people to worship and faith. Some examples being Contemporary family services in Yass, Family camps in Yass and Cootamundra, Day Camping in Cootamundra and Wentworthville.

A Learning and evolving Ministry

Neville was never a person to keep things the way they were because that was the way it was done. Usually in his quiet but resolute manner he would encourage change.

This including his own self development. He never stopped learning. After college he completed a Diploma in Religious Education whilst in Narooma and a Certificate in Pastoral Counselling through St Marks during our time in Yass.

A focus on a gospel of love, forgiveness, compassion and practical ministry to those who needed it.

In many placements Neville set up activity groups for elderly people. In Yass he was instrumental in setting up the Age Care facility on land owned by the Church.

At any and every opportunity Neville would acknowledge his wife Molly's contribution to his ministry, both in direct terms and in supporting him and particularly in the times he was in College

Retirement

Initially this was in Wentworthville and included some short term supply ministries. It was a time to re-invest in gardening (especially fuchsias and natives) and research family history. Later he was involved with Centenary Church in Parramatta.

It was during this time that Neville's respiratory illness began to become chronic and at times, life threatening. This prompted a move to Wollondilly Gardens at Goulburn at the end of 2003.

Characteristically, Neville became involved in things in this church community and at Wollondilly Gardens. After a very serious hospitalization in August 2011 moved into Tenison Age Care apartments.

To summarise Neville's life I would like to leave you with four words to remember him by.

1. Creative

In so many ways Neville created good things, from gardens, to photography groups.

2. Connection

Neville was about connecting with people. This connection spanned from friendships of 75 years to the very recent friendships in Goulburn, always with compassion.

3. Couple

Over the years so many remark on how Neville and Molly were such a strong couple and how much love they shared together.

4. Call

Neville felt a strong call. His life is witness to the vindication of this call. It was a call to minister in the literal meaning of the word, as a servant, one who attends to the needs of others.

REV. DR MOIRA LAIDLAW
30 May, 1934 – 21 November, 2013

Rev Moira Brownlee Laidlaw died in Nambour Hospital on 27 November 2013, following a massive stroke.

Moira was born on 30th May 1934, in Edinburgh Scotland, raised in the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Her family was very much involved in the church community and even through extreme weather conditions they would walk the long road to church daily, sometimes three times a day.

After marriage, John and Moira Laidlaw spent six weeks honeymooning while sailing to Australia and settled in Sydney. John worked as a printer, and Moira worked as an Engineer tracer; they bought their first home in Dee Why, before the children arrived: Fiona, Alison and Colin in quick succession.

Moira had been asked to if she was interested in teaching a scripture class, she rediscovered her joy of sharing God's word via fun and craft activities with the children. In one late night preparation session, Moira experienced a voice in the room, out loud, "You did not go down those steps by accident, I have work for you to do." She experienced an overwhelmingly strong feeling of love and peace, it filled the room and filled her whole being and she found herself weeping with joy. It was like nothing else she had ever experienced, God had spoken to her and she knew it. Then, she still needed to prepare the scripture lesson and the reading was literally standing in 3D off the page.

John 15:1-12 (NRSV)

8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

After some time, arguing with God, losing sleep and getting more involved in the local church, a sermon speaking about "spiritually dry bones" and the finger pointing, the minister said, "and what are you going to do about it?" The word MINISTRY kept imposing itself on her. OK, You got me!, she said. Moira had to update her education qualifications, so along with their three teenage children studying, she completed her Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Theology.

After being invited to do some lecturing in NT and then in OT in Sydney, she was therefore only available to a Sydney appointment and in the early 1980's women were seen as an unknown quality. She was appointed to Crow's Nest UCA when their minister of 36 years died and after a 6 week supply, they proceeded to call her saying, "better the devil you know." John had concluded his printing business giving Moira's undeniable call to ministry priority and became her trusted helper and partner in ministry.

After about 10 years in Crow's Nest (NSW) they moved to a country parish in Narromine/ Trangie/ Dandaloo. Numerous people turned up on the doorstep, "I heard you are the church that helps people."

Moira felt a strong call to write liturgies with an Australian context and was invited to do a Doctorate of Ministry, a practical degree intended to be of assistance to the church at large. With a thesis on "The Use of Art Forms in the Worship of the Uniting Church in Australia," she received her D.MIn in 1992. When she retired early, she decided to concentrate on writing Liturgies on the common lectionary, to be shared online. [Over Easter 2013 some 26,000 people in 87 countries had used them] God really was using her to "bear fruit" (John 15).

Even in retirement Moira's life was jam packed with projects and activities, all of which served her family, or her dear friends of her church. She enjoyed her retirement years, in her little piece of paradise at Caloundra by the sea, with the man of her dreams. She is survived by her husband John, three children, six grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. She had boundless amounts of energy right until the end and will continue to influence and inspire so many, we thank God for her remarkable life or service, faith and love.

(Minute received by the The Uniting Church in Australia QUEENSLAND SYNOD at the 31st Synod 2014 meeting)

REV. DR JOHN MCCARTHY
Deceased 11 July, 2014

Born at Camperdown, John Wesley McCarthy grew up at Croydon in Sydney. Converted at a crusade, he attended the Methodist Church. At 17, John felt called to the Methodist Institute of Evangelism (then led by Rev Sir Alan Walker). John's passion for helping people know Jesus Christ and encouraging them to follow him was life-long. While at the Institute, he met Barbara, who worked in the Methodist Connexional Office. They were married on the 12th of December 1964. During five years at Leigh College, John completed his BA (Sydney) and worked towards his BD (MCD), (completed while serving congregations). After a Student Pastorate at Roselle, his probationer appointment in 1967 was Cessnock, where Nicole was born. Ordained in 1968, his next appointment was Muswellbrook in 1969, where Brad was born. The family then moved in 1974 to Wellington, where John began his doctorate, followed by the Eastwood Parish in Sydney in 1977. Considering church growth and development in his doctoral research led to John's appointment as WA Synod Consultant in Parish Growth and Mission in 1984. John foresaw changes the church was facing and yet so few (me included) saw the implications. However, he found the travelling required of consultants onerous and missed congregational ministry. In 1986, he went to the Wembley/Floreat Parish. Although these were difficult years, as a significant number left the Parish and the Uniting Church, he made some very close friendships. After this turmoil, he moved to Orange in NSW. However, the extreme weather was unsuitable (having about 40% lung capacity), and he retired from ministry in 1991 for health reasons. He then worked in the travel industry in various capacities. In recent years, John was delighted to return to part-time ministry at Crossways Wanneroo. He prized leading worship and offering pastoral care. His gift of connecting with people came to the fore. John also loved to support others' ministries, was keen to know what was going on in the wider church and, at Wanneroo, took particular interest in the ministry of government school chaplains. Above all, John deeply loved his family. He and Barbara shared almost fifty years' married. They enjoyed travel, including on some European trips through the Christian peace movement, and to the USA where he conducted missions. The whole family spent time in San Francisco during his doctoral study. During his last years, living with his lung condition, the consequences of heart surgery and other health issues took their toll. John died surrounded by family: Barbara, Nicole, her husband Michael, Brad, his wife Sarah, and grandchildren Sarah, Declan and Rory. In his dissertation, John wrote: "To the God of grace, who changed my life and called me to serve as a Minister of the Word, I owe everything. I am thankful, at this time and place, the call is to serve within the Uniting Church in Australia".

We thank God for the life and ministry of John McCarthy.

Rev. Dr Ian Tozer

REV. DANIEL MISTRY

18 May, 1945 – 16 July, 2013

NSW; 15/02/2005 Became a minister of UCA; 01/02/2005 - 28/02/2011 Caves Beach; 01/02/2011 Permanently Retired; 16/07/2013 Deceased

REV. JAMES ALEXANDER (SANDY) MURRAY, AM

9 September, 1918 – 1 May, 2014

Sandy was a Scot. Born in Glasgow in 1918, he was proud of his Scottish heritage and served in the army from 1941-46.

In 1949 he entered the ministry of the Church of Scotland, then in 1951 he was encouraged to move to Queensland where ministers were in great demand in the bush. He warmed quickly to these people, their generosity and kindness.

His ministry included parishes in the Shetland Islands, Scotland; South Melbourne, Victoria; Claremont, WA; St Columba's Church, Woollahra and Double Bay, NSW; and St Ninian's, Lyneham, Canberra.

As part of his ministry in parishes he was as one time or another Chaplain at Scotch College, WA; Army Chaplain, WA; Chaplain at the ANU in Canberra and he retired from Chaplaincy at Mirinjani Retirement Village from which he retired in 1999.

He served as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in WA from 1968 - 1969.

He was honoured with AM (member in the order of Australia). June 1983.

In his 13 years (1974-87) with St Ninian's for from 1974 – 1987 he helped to build a thriving congregation assisted by his wife, Netta who was a great inspiration to him. Some years after Netta's death and during his time as Chaplain at Mirinjani Retirement Village Sandy married Lee.

During his time at Lyneham, the congregation grew and under in 1979 the hexagonal extension to the church was undertaken and successfully completed. This was no small undertaking. However most felt that the extension was aesthetically well done using the same stone from Black Mountain as was used in the original building.

He was an active and enthusiastic member of the Rotary Club in each State and Territory where he ministered. He thought it important for clergy to meet and share worthwhile goals with others as well as become aware of a variety of community affairs and concerns.

Sandy was a great communicator and his greatest love was the English language. Reading was a daily ritual, his favourites being auto-biographies, essays and sound theology but he was also known to enjoy Agatha Christie novels.

He served some years as Chairman of the Christian Television Association, ACT and as a member of the Federal Religious Advisory Commission of the ABC in the 60s.

For over 20 years he wrote book reviews including for the Canberra Times and his 'Thoughts for the Day', found in several publications, were an inspiration for many.

He had a good sense of humour and used humour well in many of his sermons to stress a point he was making.

Sandy, with his wife Lee, resided at St Andrew's Village in Hughes for the past 5 years where he kept up his love of reading until shortly before his death.

He also tried to keep his sense of humour and enjoyed taking an interest in the staff members.

Sandy's health in the past months had become a great struggle for him and he gave up the struggle on 1st May.

As Sandy said, the saying, "There is a divinity doth shape our ends, rough hew them how we will", is indeed true.

REV. ROY NASH

4 July, 1924 – 20 May, 2013

Placements within NSW; 01/01/1992 - 30/06/1994 Kyogle Uniting Church; Permanently Retired 31/07/1994; Deceased 20/05/2013.

REV. LESLIE PEARSON

27 January, 1931 – 15 October, 2013

Placements within NSW; 1960 - 1963 Narooma; 1963 - 1966 Balmain; 1966 - 1971 Helensburgh; 1971 - 1977 Eastwood; 1977 - 1984 Chatswood-Lane Cove; 01/01/1984 - 30/04/1991 Pennant Hills; 01/05/1991 - 30/06/1996 Waverley; 01/06/1996 Permanently Retired; 15/10/2013 Deceased.

REV. LLOYD GLADSTONE PHILLIPS BA, AM.

27 April, 1918 – 21 March, 2014

With the death of the Rev. Lloyd Phillips, last March, the Church and Community mourned the loss of one who had made such a wonderful witness to his Lord, as well as a great contribution to our country through his involvement in the field of Social Services and Welfare.

He was born into a Methodist Church family, his father being the Methodist Minister in Zeehan, Tasmania, at the time. Moving to Victoria, his schooldays began in Seymour, with the passing years bringing him eventually to Queen's College, at Melbourne University, where he studied Law.

However, in 1939, he applied to become a candidate for the Methodist Ministry, was accepted the following year, by the Conference, and returned to Queen's College to study Arts and Theology. The next 5 years saw him as Supply Minister in some 5 different parishes. He was ordained in March, 1945, fulfilling an appointment, at Murrumbena, at the time.

His ministerial appointments, by the Victorian Conference, which followed his ordination, were Hopetoun (1945/46), Samoa (As Missionary 1946/47), Casterton (1947/51), Wesley,

Melbourne (1951/57), Ballarat (1957/62) and Burwood (1963/65). Over the years, from 1966, he assisted with Services at Wesley Melbourne.

In 1951, he became interested in the work of the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria and, in 1960, became Hon. Secretary, taking on full time work, with the Council, in 1966, following the conclusion of his appointment to the Burwood Parish. His involvement with the Marriage Guidance Council extended over a period of 20 years becoming the Executive Director of the Victorian Council and then, in 1976, the National Secretary. This involved travelling extensively around Australia and overseas.

In addition to his work with the Marriage Guidance Council, from 1963, he became involved with the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), an association which was to last for many years, during which time he held the position of Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary. In 1986 he was appointed to the position of Representative of the Churches in ACOSS.

In 1987, he was awarded the Australia Medal for his wonderful commitment to public service over some 30 years.

In 1993, a few years after his retirement, he and his wife, Joan, moved from Burwood, where they had their home, to Green Point, N.S.W., to be near their family. Lloyd was involved with the nearby Gosford Uniting Church, over the next 21 years, until his death.

This humble servant of God with his gentle and uplifting personality is greatly missed.

REV. KELVIN RUSSELL
15 June, 1932 – 5 June, 2014

Placements within NSW; 1955-1956 Wagga; 1956-1958 Cessnock; 1958-1962 Dapto; 1963-1969 Grenfell; 1970-1979 Parkes; 1980-1984 Balgowlah-Seaforth; 01/08/1985 - 31/07/1989 Maclean; 01/07/1989 Permanently Retired; 05/06/2014 Deceased

REV. JACK SHARP
7 September, 1926 – 13 September 2014

Placements within NSW; 1946 - 1947 Wagga Wagga; 1950 - 1956 Overseas Missions at Namatanai, Papua New Guinea; 1956 - 1962 Raluana; 1962 - 1968 District Chairman; 1968 - 1972 Uniting Church in PNG & Solomon Islands, Moderator; 1972 - 1976 Secretary/Treasurer/Education Secretary; 1976 - 1982 Awara; NSW; 01/01/1983 - 30/09/1988 Windsor-Richmond; 01/09/1988 PR; Deceased 13/09/2014

REV. IAN BOWE TANNER
24 February, 1926 – 27 December, 2013

Ian Bowe Tanner served the church with distinction as parish minister, synod staff member, first Moderator of the Synod of South Australia after the inauguration of the Uniting Church and fourth President of the Assembly of the Uniting Church from 1985 to 1988.

Born in 1926 in Tasmania, Ian served in the air force in the latter years of World War II and then became an industrial chemist working in the woollen mill in Launceston. He responded to God's call to ministry in the 1950s, studied theology in Melbourne and was ordained in

1959. He served in the Presbyterian Church in Prahran and Koonung Heights before ministering for 18 years at Scots Church, Adelaide, where his gifts of leadership became widely recognised. He then became Director of Lay Education and Director of Uniting Vision in the South Australian Synod, before shifting to the Canberra Central Parish for the last four years of ministry. He retired in 1996, and died in Canberra in January 2014.

Ian enjoyed a vibrant, thoughtful and open faith in God. He had the gift of connecting people with God through his personal caring and listening, through his apt story-telling, through his wise counsel and his lively preaching. He made everyone feel special and his positive good-humoured approach to life always left people feeling encouraged and loved.

Ian had great gifts of wisdom. His pastoral care, his respect for every person, his ability to mediate, to reconcile, to be a peacemaker, were great. In his leadership of the wider church he showed deep commitment to the people of outback Australia, to Aboriginal rights and aspirations, to the welfare needs of the Australian community, to ecumenical relationships and to good governance within the church.

Ian was strongly supported by his wife Joan, with whom he shared 63 years of happy marriage. Ian was hugely blessed by their loving relationship, a gift of God for each of them.

In 1988 the Assembly passed a long minute of appreciation for Ian's service as President. The opening paragraph reads:

"Ian Tanner has given the church a pattern of leadership which has firstly been characterised by his personal dependence on the leadership of Jesus Christ. From this strength he has shown us the way to be authoritative but not authoritarian, to be humble but not weak, to have high goals and great vision, and at the same time to recognise the leadership and abilities of others."

Those who have been touched by the life of Ian Tanner will continue to give thanks for, and celebrate, a terrific life, a beautiful person. He was a blessing to his family, his church, the community and nation, and a great servant of God. Thanks be to God.

*Gregor Henderson
November 2014*

**REV. RUSSELL THOMPSON
24 April, 1937 – 7 August, 2014**

Russell was born 24 April 1937 and lived a full life until 07 August 2014.

He trained initially as an electrician and draughtsman, but after his acceptance of Jesus as Lord at a Wesley Youth meeting he believed that he was called to work with people rather than things.

He began to test his call to the ministry by entering the Croydon Bible College in 1959, before training at Leigh College, the Methodist Theological College.

His ministry began in 1964 when he was appointed as a Probationer to Cessnock parish, under Rev Trevor Barrett as superintendent minister. He later served at Ungarie, a little country village in the middle of NSW. Prior to his ministerial training Russell served a period of National Service in the Air Force. Here he trained as a pilot. Later God used this experience through Russell's being appointed to Cobar and later Broken Hill as the Flying Padre of the Methodist Far West Mission, later to become the Uniting Church Far West Mission, from 1971 to 1978. He served in Parish ministry at St Ives (youth and small group

ministry) from 1979 to 1983, then Cronulla from 1984 to 1992, then Revesby parish (Panania and Padstow churches) from 1993 to 2001.

Russell retired from parish ministry in 2002 but continued to serve Christ in many ways at Umina-Ettalong. He and Ann were very active in Victorious Ministry Through Christ, (VMTC), a ministry for healing of the hurtful and traumatic events and relationships of people's lives. They themselves were very much blessed by this ministry, and able in turn to bless others in this way.

He is also remembered for his attention to detail in all things, his gift of planning, his love of swimming and making things, and his genuine concern for others, usually expressed in acts of service. We remember Russell.

REV. DIETER TIEMAN

26 December, 1928 – 12 August, 2013

1969 - 1972 Overseas mission in Timor-Indonesia; Placements within NSW; 1973 - 1980 South Illawarra; 01/01/1981 - 30/06/1990 North Belconnen and Wattle Park ; 01/07/1990 Permanently Retired; 12/08/2013 Deceased in Canberra Hospital

REV. DR TUIKILAKILA WAQAIRATU

Uniting Church saddened by death of Fiji Methodist President Waqairatu

The Uniting Church in Australia is shocked and saddened to hear of the death today of the President of the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma President Waqairatu.

A former General Secretary of the Church, Rev Waqairatu commenced his term as President in mid-2012 and was inducted as President at the 2013 Methodist Conference in Suva.

Rev Waqairatu was admitted to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital in Suva two days before he passed away. He was 66 years old and is survived by his wife Joana and daughter Salote.

UnitingWorld National Director Rev Dr Kerry Enright said Rev Waqairatu was one of the Pacific church's great leaders and had been guiding the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma in a remarkable process of reconciliation and renewal.

"My dear friend Rev Waqairatu was committed to reform the church so it would be faithful to the Gospel and alert to changes happening in Fiji and across the Pacific," Dr Enright said.

Rev Waqairatu was recently quoted as saying, "There have been mistakes in the past and we have not remained abreast with the changes, we have not evolved but it is time to change."

The late President was also an audacious advocate for the place of women in the church and society and at the 2013 Conference challenged ministers to treat their wives with respect. "They think they have been called to serve while their wives are just there to cook, clean and do other domestic duties," he said.

He said that wives of pastors represented the women in the church and more should be done to help build women's relationship within the church. He encouraged the pastors of the church to look after their wives and build a strong equal relationship.

Growing up in Naroi village on Moala Island, Rev Waqairatu was encouraged to become a minister by his father and grandfather and completed his secondary education at Central Fijian School – now Sila Central High – less than two kilometres from the Davuilevu Theological College where he would eventually study for the ministry and in due course became Principal.

During the recent Methodist Conference in Suva Rev Waqairatu was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity from Vision University in the USA.

This year sees the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma celebrating the 50th anniversary of becoming an independent conference.

In a symbol of his humility Rev Waqairatu had planned to celebrate the anniversary by washing the feet of the superintendent ministers and lay leaders of the Church's 55 divisions. He was intending to ask these leaders to go back to their divisions and continue the process until every church had held a washing of the feet, as a sign of humility, servant hood and seeking forgiveness.

UnitingWorld understands that, according to the procedures of the Methodist Church, the former President Rev Ame Tugae will act as the Interim President until a new President is elected.

UnitingWorld Associate Director Church Solidarity (Pacific) Mr Bruce Mullan said Rev Waqairatu's death was an absolute tragedy for the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma.

"To be struck down just as he was leading the church in the changing context that is Fiji is a huge loss both to the Methodist and the ecumenical movement in Fiji," Mr Mullan said.

"People in Fiji, Australia and across the Pacific will be saddened by this news and the Uniting Church in Australia offers its prayers and deep condolences to the family and to our Partner Church in Fiji."

Kerry Enright

(<http://www.unitingworld.org.au/uniting-church-saddened-by-death-of-fiji-methodist-president-waqairatu/>)