



UNIVERSITY  
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# Research Day 2026

Transformation • Leadership • Collaboration • Diversity

The University of Divinity's annual Research Day connects our researchers and wider community in person and online. Our research community explores the Divinity disciplines and engages a diversity of academic fields, practices and contemporary issues.

WEDNESDAY 3 JUNE  
St Paschal Campus • Adelaide Hub • Online



# Research Day 2026

Wednesday 3 June



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## Welcome

### St Paschal Campus

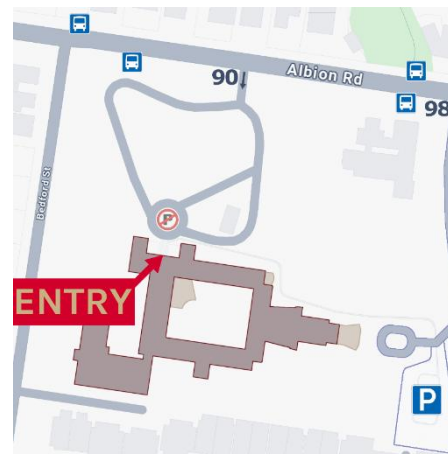
[90 Albion Road, Box Hill, Victoria, 3128](#)

Entry: via Reception

Drop-off/Pick-up: driveway circuit via 90 Albion Road entrance

Parking: car park via 98 Albion Road entrance (overflow parking on Bedford Street)

Public Transport: [Box Hill](#) and [Laburnum](#) train stations  
[733 Bus](#) to/from Box Hill train station



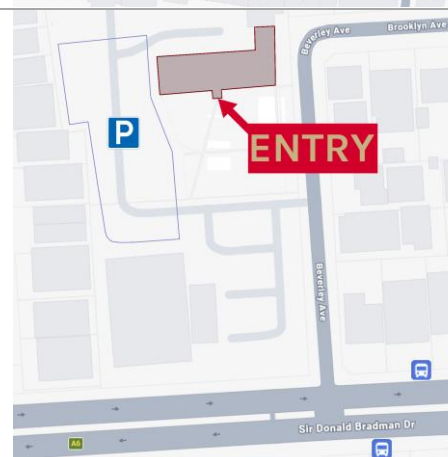
### Adelaide Hub at UCLT

[312 Sir Donald Bradman Drive, Brooklyn Park, South Australia, 5032](#)

Entry: via front entrance (Yarthu Apintheta building)

Parking/Drop-off/Pick-up: carpark via Beverly Street or Lipsett Terrace entrances

Public Transport: [Bus routes](#) to/from Sir Donald Bradman Drive



## Online – Zoom

**Connect:** Zoom links will be available in an updated program release shortly, and sent out to all registrants. The [Join Zoom](#) buttons in this updated program will take you directly to a Stream or the Keynote Presentation.

**Zoom Support:** contact (03) 9131 4915 or (03) 9853 3177

**Event times:** listed in AEST (Melbourne/Sydney/Brisbane)  
Adelaide: -½ hour | Perth: -2 hours

# Research Day Program



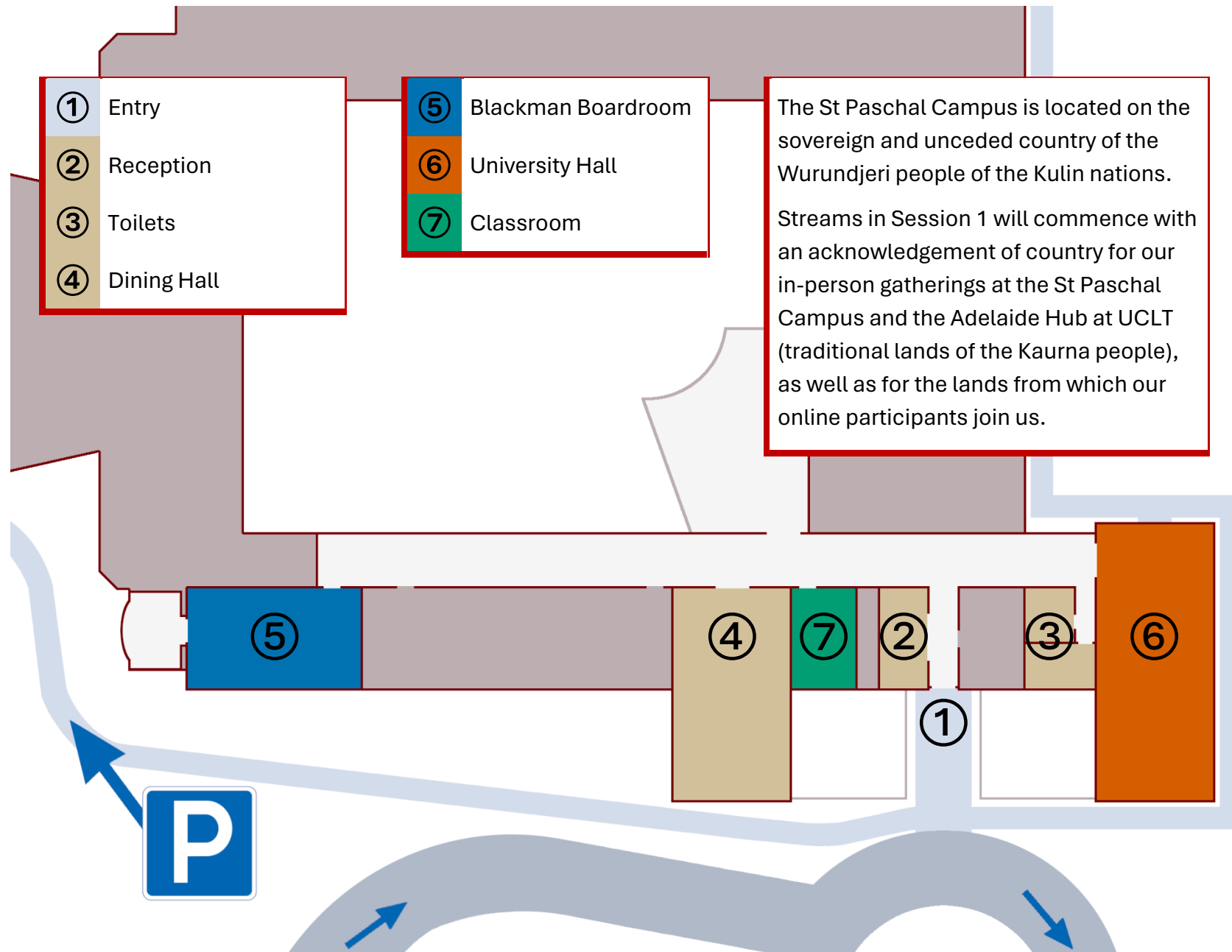
Presentations from the Adelaide Hub and over Zoom will be screened live at their listed Stream venues.

Time (AEST)	Stream 1: Blackman Boardroom   <a href="#">Join Zoom</a>	Stream 2: University Hall   <a href="#">Join Zoom</a>	Stream 3: Classroom   <a href="#">Join Zoom</a>
8:30am – 9:00am	The St Paschal Campus opens at 8:30am – join us for a tea or coffee in the Dining Hall		
<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Theology and Social Justice: Diverse Approaches</b> Chair: TBA	<b>Transformations and Hermeneutics in Historical Contexts</b> Chair: TBA	<b>Theological Methodology</b> Chair: TBA
9:00am – 9:30am	<b>Thomas Brennan</b>   Adelaide Hub A Lutheran theological lens for social justice	<b>Wendy Mayer</b>   Adelaide Hub Revisiting the role of the priest as experienced by John Chrysostom	<b>Jeremy Holt</b>   Zoom Fearful asymmetry: writing the sacred at a metamodern-theopoetic threshold
9:35am – 10:05am	<b>Khoi Doan Nguyen</b>   St Paschal Campus The broken vessel: vulnerability and vision impairment through Nouwen and Brown	<b>Jonathan Lo</b>   St Paschal Campus Adapting Bonaventure's sapiential theology in the <i>Speculum dominarum</i> of Durand of Champagne	<b>Fergus King</b>   St Paschal Campus The Spirit does matter: farewelling metaphysical dualism in the Gospel of John
10:10am – 10:40am	<b>Shirantha Perera</b>   St Paschal Campus Restoring hope through farmer-managed natural regeneration: a theological exploration	<b>Kris Sonek</b>   St Paschal Campus Ancient and modern readings of Genesis in conversation	<b>Simon Wayte</b>   St Paschal Campus A Christology of presence
10:05am – 10:40am	Dining Hall: Morning Tea		
<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Bible and Body</b> Chair: TBA	<b>Ecumenism in Action</b> Panel Session	<b>Hope, the Body and Practical Theology</b> Chair: TBA
11:05am – 11:35am	<b>Monica Melanchthon</b>   St Paschal Campus Judith at the intersection of space and culture: negotiation and resistance	<b>Glen O'Brien (Panel Convenor)</b>   St Paschal Campus <i>We Believe in One God: Sixty Years of Methodists and Catholics Walking Together</i>	<b>Sarah Lawson</b>   Adelaide Hub παράλληλη: a lexical analysis of a 'transformative' hapax legomenon
11:40am – 12:10pm	<b>Wendy Elson</b>   Zoom A seat at the table: when eschatological menus offer "shake 'n bake" recipes for vanilla palettes	Joining Glen O'Brien for this panel are Robert Gribbin, Katherine Massam, Sally Douglas and Max Vodola	<b>Belinda D Couto</b>   Zoom Reconceptualising hope: adult learners, disruption, and the possibility of renewal
12:15pm – 12:45pm	3MT Competition in University Hall   <a href="#">Join Zoom</a>		
12:45pm – 1:30pm	Dining Hall: Lunch		
<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Spiritual Care, Safeguarding and Lived Experience</b> Chair: TBA	<b>LGBTIQA+ Clergy Experiences in the Salvation Army</b> Panel Session	<b>Pastoral Leadership</b> Chair: TBA
1:30pm – 2:00pm	<b>Joan Wright Howie</b>   St Paschal Campus Presence CARE: practicing spiritually informed care	<b>Brad Watson (Panel Convenor)</b>   St Paschal Campus The Experiences of LGBTIQA+ Clergy: <i>Queer Blood &amp; Fire</i>	<b>Stefan Gigacz</b>   Zoom Is the see judge act outdated?
2:05pm – 2:35pm	<b>Cathie Lambert</b>   Adelaide Hub The shadow of the church? Spiritual abuse embedded in systems and processes	Joining Brad Watson for the launch and discussion of his book are Glen O'Brien, Kris Halliday and Cath McKinney	<b>Craig Mitchell</b>   Adelaide Hub Leading congregations of transforming faith
2:40pm – 3:10pm	<b>Elizabeth Lee</b>   St Paschal Campus Transforming theologies of forgiveness so safeguarding ≠ 70 x 7		<b>Nigel Rogers</b>   Adelaide Hub Leadership of church councils in the Uniting Church
3:10pm – 3:20pm	Gather at University Hall		
<b>Keynote</b>	University Hall   <a href="#">Join Zoom</a>		
3:20pm – 4:20pm	<b>Robyn Wrigley-Carr (Associate Professor of Spirituality and Spiritual Care, Whitley College)</b> Attentiveness to 'Eternity': Underhill, von Hügel and Dementia		

# Research Day at the St Paschal Campus



The St Paschal Campus opens at 8:30am – join us for a tea or coffee in the Dining Hall. Session 1 will commence at 9:00am sharp.





Stream 1: Blackman Boardroom

[Join Zoom](#)

Theology and Social Justice: Diverse Approaches | Chair: TBA

## Thomas Brennan

Adelaide Hub

### A Lutheran theological lens for social justice

Scholarship has traditionally suggested that, just as Martin Luther had little concern for reforming society, Lutheran theology and the wider Lutheran church have similarly shown little interest in social justice. However, contemporary scholars are increasingly challenging this critique. This presentation surveys key Lutheran theological concepts, identifying resources that provide a compelling theological rationale for social justice work already underway in Lutheran communities. This approach offers both a theological foundation for current initiatives and inspiration for future endeavours.

## Khoi Doan Nguyen

St Paschal Campus

### The broken vessel: vulnerability and vision impairment through Nouwen and Brown

This paper draws upon the writings of Henri Nouwen, a prominent twentieth century Catholic spiritual author and psychologist, and the research of Brené Brown, a contemporary American scholar in the fields of social work and vulnerability. Through an autoethnographic lens, this paper explores a spirituality of vulnerability shaped by the lived experience of vision impairment. The paper serves as a reminder to acknowledge and accept vulnerability as a fundamental human characteristic, asserting that every individual is vulnerable at various stages and in diverse ways throughout their lives. Living with a disability, such as vision impairment, offers a prophetic presence, and it calls humanity – across all ages and circumstances – to care for and learn from one another in pursuit of a more meaningful and wholehearted existence.

## Shirantha Perera

St Paschal Campus

### Restoring hope through farmer-managed natural regeneration: a theological exploration

This presentation delves into the intersection of faith, climate justice, and transformational development through the perspective of farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR). Although FMNR is increasingly acknowledged worldwide as a successful and effective environmental restoration and community empowerment strategy, its theological implications have not been previously studied. Hence, my research aims to address this gap by exploring the research question: does FMNR as a transformational development project model restore hope among the most vulnerable communities in Timor-Leste? If so, what is the nature of this hope that those communities experience?"



Stream 2: University Hall

[Join Zoom](#) 

Transformations and Hermeneutics in Historical Contexts | Chair: TBA

## Wendy Mayer

Adelaide Hub

### Revisiting the role of the priest as experienced by John Chrysostom

This paper, in preparation for a forthcoming book chapter, revisits the role of presbyter as witnessed by the late-fourth-century priest of Syrian Antioch, John, who at the turn of that century briefly served as bishop of Constantinople. Prior studies of this topic have typically started with his treatise *On the Priesthood*. That treatise, however, is apologetic and so presents an idealised view. My own approach is to start at the end of his career – his engagement with presbyters during his exile – and to work backwards in time, focusing on the evidence to be gleaned from his sermons. How broad a picture of the presbyters he worked with can we recover? Do they reveal anything new about his own experience? In this paper, I will outline the kind of information that can be retrieved and present some examples of what it meant to be a working priest in Antioch and Constantinople at this period.

## Jonathan Lo

St Paschal Campus

### Adapting Bonaventure's sapiential theology in the *Speculum dominarum* of Durand of Champagne

The *Speculum dominarum* (Mirror of the Queen) was written by the Franciscan confessor Durand of Champagne (died c.1314) for Jeanne of Navarre, queen of France from 1285 to 1305. Although it was traditionally dismissed as lacking intellectual and moral value, a new edition by Anne Flottès-Dubrulle builds upon recent work focused on its socio-political and intellectual significance as a didactic treatise in Christian *sapientia* (wisdom). I examine further how Durand drew upon the sapiential theology of Bonaventure (c.1217-1274). I contend that Durand, in response to his queenly context and audience, adapted Bonaventure's theory of sapiential self-actualisation. I show that Durand's practical manual provided spiritual and moral instruction on how to rule virtuously and wisely, going beyond Bonaventure's scholastic approach tailored to his audience in the Franciscan Order and University of Paris.

## Kris Sonek

St Paschal Campus

### Ancient and Modern Readings of Genesis in Conversation

Recent work in biblical interpretation, including studies by Brian E. Daley and Richard S. Briggs, has raised the question of how premodern and modern exegesis might speak to one another. My paper responds to that question by examining the rabbinic and patristic interpreters' attention to semantic detail in the ancestral narratives of Genesis. These early interpreters carefully analyse words, clauses, and larger textual units in ways that anticipate modern exegetical concerns about textual meaning. Premodern exegesis deserves more than a place in the history of interpretation; it can illuminate our understanding of biblical language.



Stream 3: Classroom

[Join Zoom](#)

Theological Methodology

Chair: TBA

## Jeremy Holt

Zoom

### Fearful asymmetry: writing the sacred at a metamodern-theopoetic threshold

What might it mean to encounter – or write – the sacred from within a ‘time between worlds’, where modern certainty has receded and postmodern fragmentation offers no lasting ground? Can literary fiction function as a site of metamodern-theopoetic inquiry through a mode of recursive praxis? Using my novel *Everything That Stands* as a performative partner, in this paper I ask whether narrative recursion – in which the sacred is not fixed but continually re-engaged – might generate what I term ‘asymmetric-symmetric symbiosis’: a dynamic in which meaning emerges through the interplay of tension and coherence. Might the sacred, in this context, appear as ‘fearful asymmetry’ – as an unsettling presence encountered through story that invites the ongoing reconfiguration of meaning?

## Fergus King

St Paschal Campus

### The Spirit does matter: farewell metaphysical dualism in the Gospel of John

The Fourth Gospel shows strong evidence of a dualism. But what form does this take, given the potential diversities of such a framework? Noting the detail which Jörg Frey has given to these matters in relation to modern scholarship and Judaic material in circulation when the Fourth Gospel was written, this paper asks similar questions of Hellenistic traditions which had potential to shape either of its formation or reception. Studies of Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and popular materials show that a metaphysical dualism should not be assumed as a dominant concept. If it is set aside, the identity of the Fourth Gospel’s dualism as both ethical and relational becomes apparent and provides no *a priori* obstacle to the concepts of incarnation or sacraments.

## Simon Wayte

St Paschal Campus

### A Christology of presence

The risen Lord Jesus promises to be with his disciples until the ultimate consummation of the world. This paper addresses the question of how the risen Lord continues to be present in the world, opening up a Christology organised around the concept of presence. Christ becomes present to the world in a non-local pneumatic mode in and through concrete structures of right relationship in the world. These relational structures, originating from the personal relational interaction of Christ and the Spirit, will be unpacked to show forth the provisional nature of Christ’s human freedom oriented towards the salvation of the world. In outlining the development from a provisional expression of the divine plan in Christ’s humanity to a definitive one, this paper will show how a Christology of presence can genuinely allow for Christ experiencing real temptation despite the impossibility of sin.



Stream 1: Blackman Boardroom |

[Join Zoom](#) 

Bible and Body | Chair: TBA

## Monica Melanchthon

St Paschal Campus

### Judith at the intersection of space and culture: negotiation and resistance

Women's bodies in all cultures occupy and inhabit disparate discursive spaces. These spaces are often rooted and embedded in patriarchal ideologies demanding disparate, distinctive, and sometimes contradictory renderings of the female body. This paper seeks to study the body of Judith in the Apocryphal book of Judith, exploring her life and body at the intersection of space, culture and subjectivity by taking cue and insight from women's lives and performance in India.

## Wendy Elson

Zoom

### A seat at the table: when eschatological menus offer 'shake n bake' recipes for vanilla palettes

The biblical story of the heavenly banquet provides an image of inclusion for all diners, provided they come to the table. This paper explores the dominant models of the banquet table served up as part of the theological diet Christians consume. I will argue that many of these models fail the taste test and their 'shake and bake' convenience does not represent the experience of many people living with disability. 'People with disability' are not a homogenous group, yet eschatological casseroles only seem to offer a one-size mash, served up like vanilla ice cream for dessert. Ableist bias assumes cure is necessary in the afterlife. I will challenge the dominant models and the discourse that foregrounds the heavenly eradication of disability. Can we countenance the idea that people might keep the scars of an embodied existence in 'heaven', and is cure the only condiment available?



Stream 2: University Hall | [Join Zoom](#) 

Ecumenism in Action | Panel Session

**Glen O'Brien (Panel Convenor)**

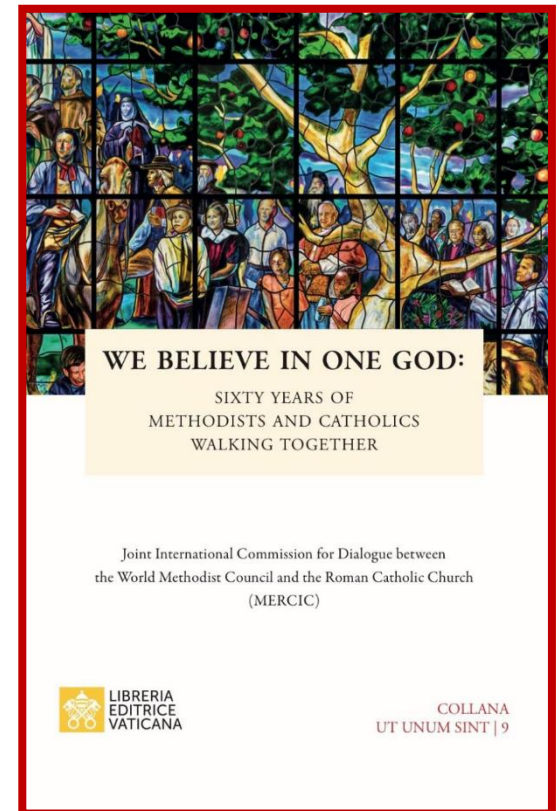
**With Robert Gribbin, Katherine Massam, Sally Douglas and Max Vodola**

**We Believe in One God: 60 Years of Methodists and Catholics Walking Together**

The Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission (MERCIC) is the longest standing ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and any other body.

This panel, convened by a current member of the Commission, brings together two Catholic and two Uniting Church people to reflect on the synthesis document published in 2025 to commemorate and summarise this landmark series of conversations.

St Paschal Campus





Stream 3: Classroom

[Join Zoom](#) 

Hope, the Body and Practical Theology

Chair: TBA

## Sarah Lawson

Adelaide Hub

### παραλλαγή: a lexical analysis of a ‘transformative’ hapax legomenon

The phrase “there is no shadow of turning with thee” is familiar to many as a line from “Great is Thy Faithfulness” which draws from James 1:17. This phrase broadly communicates the idea that God does not change or ‘transform’ and is made up of NT three hapax legomena, παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα. This paper forms the first part of a larger project conducting lexical analyses on all three lexemes, examining παραλλαγή using my eclectic linguistic method. This study examines gaps in evidence for some common proposals for this word’s senses, philosophical discussion from Diogenes Laertius, poetic and conceptual intertextuality with Jewish Berakoth, possible astronomy connotation, treatment in ancient translations and the Greek Church Fathers, reception history, textual variations, as well as conceptual metaphor involvement, paradigmatic relationships, discourse analysis, and more.

## Belinda D Couto

Zoom

### Reconceptualising hope: adult learners, disruption, and the possibility of renewal

This paper examines how hope is experienced among adult learners returning to higher education through the Clemente Program, a community-based initiative supporting individuals who have experienced educational disruption. Dominant models conceptualise hope as a cognitive, goal-directed construct - often assuming stable life conditions and linear educational pathways. Drawing on a qualitative-dominant case study, this research explores how hope is more dynamic - shaped through relational, pedagogical, and contextual conditions. Narrative interviews with learners and alumni reveal that hope is not simply an internal trait, but an evolving, socially embedded experience linked to identity reconstruction and future-oriented narratives. The paper contributes to ongoing debates in hope theory by arguing for a more contextually grounded understanding of hope in marginalised learning environments.



University Hall |

[Join Zoom](#) 

St Paschal Campus

## Three-Minute Thesis Competition: University of Divinity HDR Students Present their Research

The Three Minute Thesis competition celebrates the exciting research conducted by Doctorial students. Developed by The University of Queensland, 3MT cultivates students' academic, presentation, and research communication skills. The competition supports their capacity to effectively explain their research in three minutes, using language appropriate to a non-specialist audience.

The School of Graduate Research invites you to support our HDR students as they present their work. A judging panel will award a \$150 book voucher prize for the most compelling presentation at the conclusion of the competition.





## Joan Wright Howie

St Paschal Campus

### Presence CARE: practicing spiritually informed care

The 2024 Aged Care Act sets out a range of rights, including recipients' right to have their spirituality supported and funded by appropriately qualified workers (Sec. 23, p. 53). If spiritual care is everyone's responsibility, care workers will need a clear description of what spiritually informed care practice looks like in practice. Joan will share outcomes from her PhD research, which included reading 622 narratives by spiritual care practitioners about client encounters, interviewing aged care residents and staff, and consulting with managers to articulate a flow and framework to inform spiritually informed encounters. She will also provide an overview of the Presence CARE framework developed through the research process and consider how the model could enhance the provision of spiritually informed care in Aged Care contexts and beyond.

## Cathie Lambert

Adelaide Hub

### The shadow of the church? Spiritual abuse embedded in systems and processes

Research concerning spiritual abuse often focuses on modes of leadership and methods used to disempower or silence individuals. Often this behaviour is enacted consciously, even if the acts are not recognised as abusive. The question this paper will ask is whether spiritual abuse can surface in unconscious ways through the creation and implementation of policies and procedures within our institutions. Carl Jung talked about the collective shadow. Is it possible that our churches have collective shadows that affect how we structure ourselves and work together? How might our implementation of our own rules and procedures, often designed to keep people safe, become spiritually abusive when those with power unconsciously act from a place of fear? This paper will explore some initial thoughts for such a research project and the possible implications for our faith communities.

## Elizabeth Lee

St Paschal Campus

### Transforming theologies of forgiveness so safeguarding ≠ 70 x 7

Questions of forgiveness arise when a Person of Concern wants to be part of a worshipping community. In examining Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and his affirmation of the social dignity of those who are oppressed, it is essential that Matthew 18:21-22 be seen in its wider context. This will then enable greater discernment when responding to the 'safe' inclusion of people who have engaged in behaviour violating sexual boundaries. Doing so decentres Persons of Concern and privileges the lived/living experience of individuals and communities harmed by through sexual and other traumatising violence.



Stream 2: University Hall | [Join Zoom](#) 

Queer Clergy in the Salvation Army | Panel Session

**Brad Watson (Panel Convenor)**

**With Glen O'Brien, Kris Halliday and Cath McKinney**

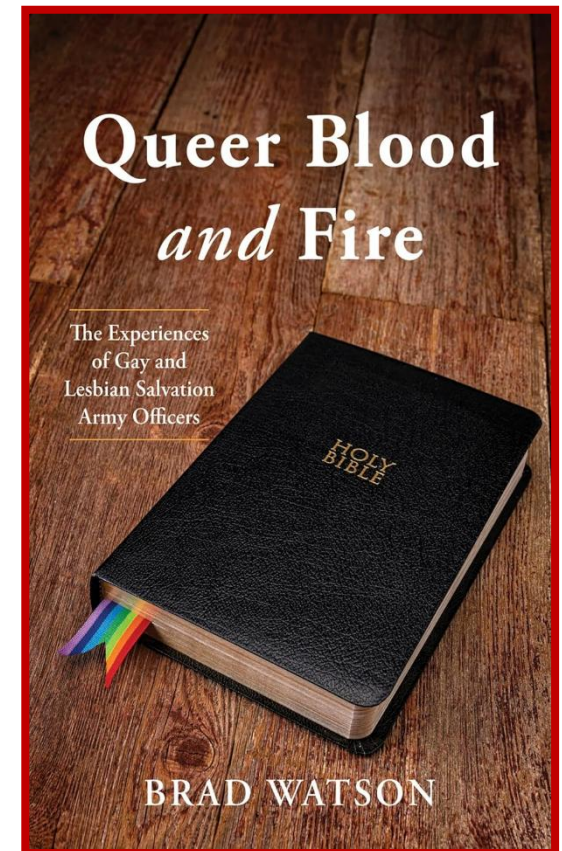
St Paschal Campus

The Experiences of LGBTIQ+ Clergy: *Queer Blood & Fire*

Brad Watson's new book, *Queer Blood and Fire* (Resource Publications, 2025), is based on his doctoral research into the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ Salvation Army Officers.

The Salvation Army declares in its international mission statement that it serves suffering humanity without discrimination, and this is demonstrably the case for those whom the movement would serve in society. The experience of queer members within the movement is not, however, defined by the mission statement and rarely correlates. Historic influences and conservative theologies in leadership and congregations strongly determine the lived experience for these people, as do regulations that heavily dictate the nature of relationships and marriages that are permissible.

This session marks the book's formal launch, with panel's discussions considering the broader experiences of clergy who are sexuality and gender diverse in Australia.





Stream 3: Classroom

[Join Zoom](#)

Pastoral Leadership

Chair: TBA

## Stefan Gigacz

Zoom

### Is the see judge act outdated?

Some argue that “Conversation in the Spirit” goes beyond or supersedes the see judge act method that is synonymous with Joseph Cardijn as well as Catholic Social Teaching and Praxis. Others criticise Cardijn’s method as too “sociological.” This paper argues that the Cardijn method is more relevant than ever for a time described by Pope Francis as “not era of change but a change of era.” Beginning with its historical roots and development, it explains the see judge act method, not as a means of implementing Catholic social teaching but primarily as a means both of integral personal formation and social transformation. It highlights the foundations of the method as a means of facilitating discernment and dialogue as well as promoting collaboration among people of varying philosophical, political and faith backgrounds that is increasingly relevant in a multifaith, multicultural society.

## Craig Mitchell

Adelaide Hub

### Leading congregations of transforming faith

What are the qualities of ministry leaders in churches in which Christian faith is not only formative but also transformative? Just over a decade ago I conducted field research across the Uniting Church in Australia, interviewing ministry leaders about the nature of Christian education and formation in congregations. In those interviews leaders described the faith-forming approaches for both themselves and their churches. Using a grounded theory approach, I developed a schema for understanding some dynamics of faith communities as learning communities and also the nature of their leadership. This paper presents that schema and discusses the groundwork for another round of field interviews to further develop these findings.

## Nigel Rogers

Adelaide Hub

### Leadership of church councils in the Uniting Church

The congregation is at the centre of the Uniting Church in Australia’s (UCA) ecclesiology. The church council provides strategic and spiritual leadership across the life of the congregation, empowering it to share in the ongoing ministry of Jesus. A common problem across many church councils, in my experience, is a lack of understanding of the UCA’s theological foundations, as articulated in the Basis of Union. As such, the structures and practices of church councils and congregations end up being untethered from the core narrative that should shape the life of the gathered community of faith. The focus of this presentation will be to outline the design of a guided learning resource that aims to equip and empower the leadership of church councils to ground their practices in the core narrative of the UCA, as expressed within the Basis of Union.

# Keynote Presentation



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3:20pm – 4:20pm in University Hall | [Join Zoom](#) 

## Robyn Wrigley-Carr

Associate Professor of Spirituality and Spiritual Care, Whitley College

### Attentiveness to ‘Eternity’: Underhill, von Hügel and Dementia

This keynote explores attentiveness to ‘Eternity’ in the writings of Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) and Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925). Both writers emphasise how an unseen spiritual reality perpetually infuses our visible physical world. For Underhill, ‘mystics’ are those who attend to this unseen reality and everyone has the potential to be a mystic. Silence is viewed as key to nurturing awareness of this reality.

In this keynote, attentiveness to ‘Eternity’ is applied to a cohort who experience much silence – people living with moderate to advanced dementia. I argue that in this silence, the Spirit continues to maintain communion with those who have dementia, and so I explore spiritual care that might help people with dementia experience God’s presence in their daily lives.

The keynote concludes by considering AI-enabled socially assistive robots in residential aged care. The question of whether ‘spiritually assistive robots’ might be able to help people with dementia be attentive to ‘Eternity’ is briefly explored.

*Robyn will be introduced by Professor Megan Cassidy-Welch (Dean of Research Strategy), who will also moderate questions after the presentation.*

