

# a la carte

Daily menu for the 10th Uniting Church Assembly, July 12-19 2003

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## Haire accuses government of 'serial ignorance'

The retiring President yesterday spoke out against abysmal moral standards in Australian politics and a conspiracy of ignorance on the part of the Federal Government and Opposition.

Rev Professor James Haire (*right*), in his farewell to the church's 10th national Assembly, said, "Many things in this nation, frankly, are rotten – in foreign policy, in immigration policy and in welfare policy."

And the Opposition federally was as responsible as the Government for this, he said.

He said information emerging that the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq seemed to have been totally false pointed to "a self-created *serial ignorance*" among the nation's political leaders.

Prof Haire said Australians were living in a time of profound turning away from God in much of their social and national life.

He said, "At the time of the last Federal general election I said that I believed that, egged on by both political groupings in the country, we as a nation had reached new depths of political depravity, especially with the duplicity and harshness of the *Tampa* incident, and the total inability of the Federal Opposition to act as an opposition in the nation, thus depriving this nation of any genuine democratic debate



leading up to the election.

"What is now emerging from the lead-up to the Iraq War demonstrates yet again the abysmal moral standards within the US, UK and Australia."

Prof Haire said, "In democracies, the military must be totally under the control of the elected Government, and the Government must be entirely transparent to the parliament and the people.

"Truth lies at the heart of these relationships. Now that truth has been thrown overboard, our democracy is under a fearful attack from a joint conspiracy of the Government and opposition."

He said, "When 'truth' becomes a commodity manufactured by spin doctors, and aided and abetted by Government departments and political minions afraid to tell it like it really is... and then on that basis so manipulate public opinion, to send people to war where killing is inevitable, then, indeed we are in a parlous moral state."

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## Drayton: 'Government should set up a religious affairs unit'

The Federal Government should consider setting up a religious affairs unit, Rev Dr Dean Drayton (*right*), said in a "Meet the president" press conference yesterday.

He said it seemed that people tried to understand multiculturalism as though each person is still within the framework of the Christian faith.

"In fact, multiculturalism in Australia means recognising more clearly that many of the major world faiths are very active and representative in Australia," he said.

"This has become even more important to all of us since September 11 and the terrorism in Bali.

"We need a basis of understanding for working with people who are quite different from us, to find the commonalities first, rather than emphasizing the differences."



Dr Drayton said that different cultures and religions are having an impact on health, education, work – in fact, of all the major areas of government.

"When you move into the area of foreign affairs, it's even more important," he said.

"I hope there isn't a blind spot in the government that precludes us from understanding the points of view from people who come from different backgrounds.

"That can have serious implications for us as a nation in the future."

Dr Drayton said the unit would monitor government policy in the light of religion and culture.

"I wouldn't like to be making international decisions involving communities and peoples and other faiths without having as much background information as possible," he said.

## Drayton joins the order of the jumper

Western Australians have been instrumental in continuing an Assembly tradition.

Over the past several assemblies Carolyn Kitto has knitted jumpers gaily decorated with the UCA logo for each of the national presidents who are still alive.

However at the last Assembly, she announced her knitting needles were going into retirement.

Rev Wendy Snook, formerly from Western Australia and now presbytery officer for Canberra Presbytery, volunteered to take on this important task.

"It seemed to me," said Wendy, "that this task should be undertaken in good UCA style and so the knitting of Dean's jumper was the work of a team."

Merle Davis from Scarborough and Shirley Tuffey from Carine knitted the back and sleeves and Wendy knitted the front.

The eventual wearer of the jumper was a bit concerned that a team knitted jumper would result in a very odd-looking garment with sleeves of different lengths. However Wendy was able to prove both sleeves were the same length.

Adding to the Uniting Church-ness of this jumper Wendy commented that most of it had been knitted in the midst of



*Rev Prof James Haire (president 2000-03), Mrs Jill Tabart (president 1994-97) and Rev Dr Dean Drayton (current president) model their knitwear.*

the life of the Church – at PRC meetings, Placements Committee, ministers' retreats and similar events.

As she presented the jumper Wendy said, "Dean, remember this jumper comes with the hopes and prayers of us all, to comfort and surround you."

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## Indonesian churches facing Nazi-like persecution

In his retiring address to the Assembly yesterday, Rev Professor James Haire compared his term as president of the church to the struggle of the churches in Germany under the Nazis.

Citing the influence of Bonhoeffer's "The Cost of Discipleship", Prof Haire remarked: "But I did not once believe that I would live through events like the German church struggle of the 1930s and 1940s.

"Yet in these years that I have served as President, I have lived through them, through my association with Indonesia. Let me try to give it some sort of human face.

Prof Haire told the story of a former student of his, Rev Albert Lahi, parish minister at Soakonora, in Halmehera, Indonesia.

"He had been my student in theological college. He was a man of brilliance, grace and charm, married with one child.

"The Jihad and elements of the Indonesian army intended to protect the community, arrived at the church.

Albert had been working in the vestry and was caught.

"They came on him from all sides, so the witnesses told me. He knew that there was no way out. He faced them — the Jihad and the army. He asked the army to protect him; they said he was the enemy of the people.

"He asked to be allowed to put on his preaching gown and his bands. ... he knelt down at the communion table and he prayed – so children told me – for his congregation, for his persecutors, for the church, and his nation and for himself.

"He finished with the Lord's Prayer, so the witnesses told me. He lent forward, still in his gown and his bands. The machete came down. As he knelt there he was beheaded in the view of Sunday School children and others.

"I taught him theology, I engaged in his formation, I took part in his ordination. And I think on him every day of my life," Prof Haire said.

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## Reaching out to young people

Younger people are looking for new forms of faith communities, Rev Dr Dean Drayton said during a "Meet the president" press conference on Sunday.

He said he had been chairperson for the National Church Life Survey for 20 years.

"It's quite clear that the last two generations – the post World War II generation and generation X, or whatever names you want to put on them – aren't interested in accepting the denominational structure of churches from the past," he said. "They're looking for alternative forms of faith community, where people come together and worship, often about specific interests.

"My hope is that we find how we can give young leaders a much greater say in the way in which we're moving."

Younger people, he said, are looking for meaning in life. He was asked how the church could address that.

"We've been in the business of addressing it for a long time," he said.

"Rather than focussing our attention on church matters, we need to be with and alongside people, listening to their questions."

He said there is a profound search for community, meaning and hope.

"How do we express our worship in those terms – rather than opening the doors and inviting people to come and worship in a way that we've done for a long time and which doesn't, in fact, touch those deep, deep searches people are involved in?"