PCNet SA
Progressive Christianity Network



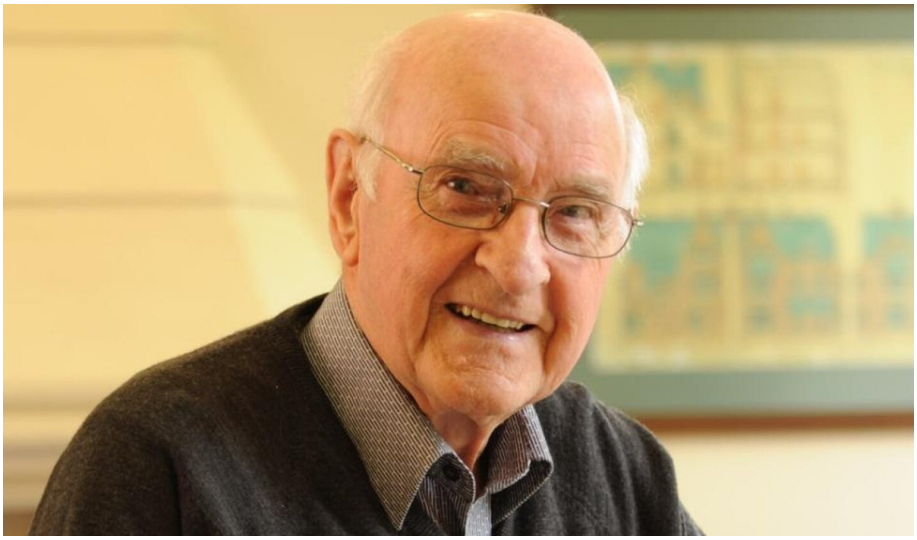
Our theme for the year, *Many Voices, Many Pathways* has highlighted the diverse backgrounds of the presenters programmed this year and recognised the many ways we can seek to engage with the divine. We have been delighted at the positive response we have met when asking busy people to take time out to be part of the series. Make sure you don't miss the final presentation for 2026 on
Dec 3rd. (See p3) We look forward to welcoming you to **PCForum 2027**

Videos of previous PCForum presentations can be viewed at
https://effectiveliving.ucasa.org.au/podcasts/

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Planning Group 2026
Kym Bills
Esmond Dowdy
Michael Dowling
Maureen Howland
Fergus McGinley
David McKirdy
Don Sinnott (chair)

In Tribute to a True Progressive
Sir Lloyd Geering



Without a doubt Lloyd Geering, a New Zealand theologian who just died at the age of 108, transcended the controversies which surrounded his espousal of Bishop John Robinson's 1963 book "Honest to God". Challenging the lingering literalism which prevailed in the Anglosphere, Robinson drew on the great theologians of the 20th century (Who had been largely ignored) and reinterpreted the core Christian beliefs from a non-dualistic world view

In a case brought before the 1967 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand the Rev Professor Lloyd Geering was charged with "doctrinal error" and "disturbing the peace of the [Presbyterian] church". The charges were brought by a group of conservative laymen and a conservative minister and oddly were hardly discussed. The charge was dismissed. Geering had claimed that the remains of Jesus lay somewhere in Israel and that the resurrection had been wrongfully interpreted by churches as a resuscitation of the body of Jesus. Despite the charge of heresy being dismissed, Geering's career as a theological professor changed course.

In fact Lloyd's writings and lectures as principal of Knox College in the 1960s marked a shift in the way many New Zealanders thought about Christianity. He questioned the idea of humans having an immortal soul and saw the resurrection at best being understood as a symbol of hope. His views and scholarship were deeply informed by his life experiences of loss and grief, and his pastoral work in his early ministries. After the heresy trial, Lloyd went on to set up religious studies program at Te Herenga Waka / Victoria University.

Sir Lloyd was born in Rangiora, during the last days of World War I. For the first 25 years of his life his family didn't have electricity. He became New Zealand's oldest man in 2025. His family said he was "known to family, friends and colleagues as a person of integrity, humour, compassion and goodwill. "He was a joy to have in our lives, and we are grateful for having him for so long."

Cont.

Cont.

Margaret Mayman, well known to many of us, paid her personal tribute writing, “As a child I knew of Lloyd because the heresy trial was national news in NZ. In 1979 -1980 I studied Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington where Lloyd was Professor of Religious Studies after theological teaching had become untenable. Lloyd’s teaching enabled me to continue my theological education with integrity. In 2002 I became minister of St Andrew’s on the Terrace in Wellington where Lloyd was a member and principal lecturer of the St Andrew’s Trust for the Study of Religion and Society. He had a long association with Common Dreams. I remember he was a keynote speaker at the 2010 event in Melbourne.”

Margaret went on to say that Lloyd outlived his fundamentalist detractors by decades and his influence lives on for so many. “I will remember him with gratitude for his theological wisdom and for his courage in standing his ground.” He aligned himself with Donald Cupit’s Sea of Faith movement and continued to influence New Zealanders right up to the last. While the institutional Church had been unsure about him, the State honoured him as a theologian, in making him part of the Order of New Zealand: just 20 members, including the likes of Kiri Te Kanawa.

Vale and thank you Lloyd. You dared to be upfront about the religious revolution of the post war period and then inspired so many of us to “come out of the closet” of pre-modern theological understandings which no longer addressed the spiritual hunger of those who live in the relational world of our times.

JONATHAN BARKER



Review - 2026 Progressive Christianity Forum

The 2026 Progressive Christianity Forum. How did we do?

It's a bit early for annual reports but any time is a good time for a stocktake.

The annual 'Forum' program the Task Group develops to serve the interests of our audience—what we term the *Progressive Christianity Network of SA*— is always a balance, and a compromise, in giving voice to differing interests. Some members of our network look for cutting-edge theology that breaks decisively with main-stream Christian doctrine; some wrestle with specific issues they encounter in their local congregation; some are curious about other faiths; some search for ways in which specific issue-driven groups and identities can find a home in Christian faith. And most are open and curious human beings more attracted to questions than answers.

With the 2026 Forum brochure in front of me I reckon we've done a good job this year in juggling a diversity of interests. Just scanning a few topic headings, our events have included some personal reflections on what being a progressive means (March), some questions raised by specific communities, including Gen Y, Z and onwards (February), people with disability/neurodivergent people (September), and those of the Hindu faith (June). We've had some challenging input from noted theologians (April and July) and opened poetic and contemplative expressions of faith (October and December). It's been a rich diet, and we've been gratified by steady attendances through the year.

Following each event we encourage feedback—on those smiley/frowny face cards we hand out with space to write—and we review what is returned by way of comments. Most feedback appears under a smiley face, but some comes under a neutral or even frowny face. With an audience that is by nature analytical and questioning what else should we expect? Future programming will learn from the feedback, positive and negative, so keep the commentary coming.

Permit me some personal reflections. Along with three other South Australians, I recently attended a weekend conference of Progressive Christians in Brisbane. This gathering sought to capture the spirit of the Progressive Christianity 'Common Dreams' conferences last held in Sydney in 2019. Some readers may have attended one or other of these earlier conferences—I haven't.
At the Brisbane gathering, I enjoyed a sense of camaraderie, being among open-minded people who candidly question much of Christian doctrine and dogma while joyfully walking as 'followers of the way'. The speakers showed a diversity of expressions of 'new paths' in faith journeys, not all of which were paths that attracted me. And that brings me back to our 2026 South Australia Forum., with its brochure headed ***Many Voices, Many Pathways.***

The sacred has many guises and none of us can claim there is a sole and unique means of encountering it. Elsewhere in this newsletter you'll hear of our work in developing the 2027 program and we'll ensure that next year's program is consistent with the 'many voice, many pathways' theme.

Don Sinnott

Next PCForum - December 3rd 2026

Living contemplatively: for the good of human community
Rev Dr Gary Stuckey

For the first 16 Centuries of Church's life, contemplative prayer was understood as the goal of Christian spirituality. After the Reformation, though, this heritage was virtually lost appearing in only a few places such as monasteries. However, in recent years there has been something of a 'rediscovery' of the contemplative way as people explore the riches of the past that have been forgotten. This evening will reflect on this 'lost' tradition; what it is, what it isn't, what are some contemplative practices and why it is important.

Gary is a retired Uniting Church minister from Adelaide, South Australia.

In 2005, after serving several congregations in SA and interstate, he helped found Stillpoint, a contemplative worshipping community. In 2008 the Stillpoint Faith Community co-located with the Stillpoint Centre of Spirituality where Ann Siddall was the director. On Ann's retirement in 2010 Gary became the Director of the centre as well as being the minister with the Faith Community.

He has had over 30 years' experience as a spiritual director and nearly that long teaching meditation and leading retreats. He has taught the History of Christian Spirituality and an intensive on Benedictine spirituality at Uniting College of Leadership and Theology and co-taught in an ecumenical program for the formation of spiritual directors. He serves as a tutor with the Monos Foundation (UK), a centre for the study of monastic spirituality. He is a Brother in the Community of the Transfiguration, a Baptist Monastery in Victoria (Aus), endeavouring to live a monastic lifestyle in the world.



Looking forward to 2027

"Many voices, many pathways" was the theme of the 2026 PCNet Forum presentations. Next year's program aims to continue in the same vein.

As 20th century followers of Jesus, we find it difficult to embrace much of the prevailing Christian doctrine and dogma. This raises the question of how we might think about biblical revelation in a world that is post-modern, post-industrial and post-Christian.

Taking into account the feedback received on this year's presentations, here are some of the possible topics and speakers currently under consideration for 2027:

Beyond the certainties - exploring faith for a changing world

Marion Millin - *What is truth?*

Jo Jordan - *Peace from a Quaker perspective*

Vicky Balabanski - *Environmental theology*

Michael Dowling - *Artificial Intelligence and our coming Cosmic Reckoning*

Toar Hutagalung - *Can the Holy Spirit bridge First Nations spirituality and the progressive/conservative divide?*

Jonathan Barker - *The Never-Ending Quest for the Divine*

Kym Bills - Is *Progressive Christianity part of the solution to address end-of-the-world fundamentalisms?*

Emelia Haskey & panel of pilgrims - *What can we learn from the Iona Community?*

Bart Brueller - *Recovering Revelation in an Era of Posts*

Cyrus Kung - *Edge Walkers: reimagining faith, church and theology*

David McKirdy

A Taste of 2027...

Engaging with Robert Wright though his book *"The God Test: Artificial Intelligence and Our Coming Cosmic Reckoning"*

Robert Wright is an evolutionary psychologist and the author of a number of remarkable books about the human experience of life. His latest book, *The God Test: Artificial Intelligence and Our Coming Cosmic Reckoning*, explores his decades long fascination with the interface between human and artificial intelligence.

Wright asserts that, when it comes to our view of AI, if we are not somewhere on the "Awe Spectrum," then we really haven't understood the magnitude of the change that is coming our way.

He examines some of the truly astounding capabilities of the so-called Large Language Models at the heart of generative and agentic AI, but also highlights genuinely disturbing developments that should make us question the ever-accelerating, no-guardrails approach currently being taken.

Are we heading for AI Heaven or the AI apocalypse/AI Hell?!

Whether we are inclined to be AI "Doomers" or AI "Optimists," Wright believes society needs to be involved in guiding AI development, rather than expecting that ultra-wealthy tech moguls, left to their own devices, will unfailingly lead us an outcome that benefits all humanity and the planet more broadly.

Wright is a big thinker and places the development of AI into a cosmic evolutionary context, and asks where things are ultimately heading. He borrows from theologians such as Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, and repurposes concepts such as the Noosphere, imagining how such cosmic consciousness might arise, and what role human and artificial consciousness, together, may play in this evolution of Cosmic Mind.

Michael Dowling

Join us as we explore some wild ideas together!

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Food for Thought

Progressing Spirit was founded in 1991, when **Bishop John Shelby Spong (June 16, 1931 – September 12, 2021)** began offering a subscription-based publication to a growing audience of those who sought out his lectures and his best-selling books. Upon Bishop Spong's retirement in 2017, that audience was spread around the globe and today's ***Progressing Spirit*** was born as an innovative next step – not simply to find another scholar like Bishop Spong, but to recruit a host of leading thinkers who could amplify ideas and insights about our progressing social, theological, and spiritual world.

Best selling authors, social leaders, and cutting edge innovators – among them Jim Burklo, Matthew Fox, Roger Wolsey, Amanda Udis-Kessler, ***Progressing Spirit*** contributors bring diverse perspectives to the growing conversation around the idea of Progressive Christianity. Inspiring, insightful, and sometimes even challenging, these unique voices come from the pulpits, academies, and front lines around the world.

The ***Progressing Spirit*** website is well worth a visit. Below is an example of a current essay by Rev Jim Burklo.
https://progressivechristianity.org/progressingspirit/about-us/

Is Progressive the right word?

Rev Jim Burklo Progressing Spirit Aug 6th 2026

"Progressive" suggests that the Christian tradition is not static – that we cherish our history while recognising and righting its wrongs, and that we extrapolate from what is good in our faith on a trajectory toward deeper love for all."

https://progressivechristianity.org/progressingspirit/ps-article/is-progressive-the-right-word/

Maureen Howland

Reading

The Roots of Progressive Christianity

Progressive Christianity – essay by Rev Roger Wolsey (*Kissing Fish)*

https://progressivechristianity.org/progressingspirit/ps-article/the-will-of-a-wittenberg-rebel

Reimagining Truth for a Progressive Faith

Essay by Rev. Dr. Mark Sandlin
February 26, 2026
https://progressivechristianity.org/progressingspirit/ps-article/reimagining-truth-for-a-progressive-faith/

New Romans

Including detailed commentaries on Paul's original Letter to the Romans, *New Romans* is a new letter to a new, 21st century audience, exploring the great Gospel themes of grace, faith, Metanoia (spiritual transformation) and Kingdom, in a new and exciting way.

New Romans Chapter 6 is out now through fergusmcginley.com.

Catch up on the Introduction and Chapters 1-5 at New Romans - Chapter 7 is due for release on 4 December. To make sure you don't miss out on future chapters, contact Fergus at fergmcginley@gmail.com or subscribe to fergusmcginley.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fergus McGinley is an Adelaide writer, teacher, lay preacher, parent, grandparent, with a background in science, philosophy, education and theology. He is the author of many essays, articles and sermons, and the recent book, *The God Who Doesn't Exist* (ATF Press, 2025).

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Keeping In Touch: helping us stay connected

As a network, we like to keep in touch with our members. We do this by means of our online database, which comprises those who have indicated that they wish to be included. The database is used to email you the PCForum program for the year, a reminder of the presentation each month, PCNet newsletters, and any other one-off items.

To help us keep in touch, we would like to ensure that our online membership database is as up-to-date as possible. As time passes, circumstances may change. People move house, change email addresses or phone numbers. We want to make sure that our records reflect these changes, so that we can keep in touch with everyone in our network.

Could you please take a moment to let us know if there have been any changes to your address, email address or phone number? You are welcome to advise us of any changes, or simply let us know that your details remain correct by contacting us at contactpcnetsa@gmail.com This email address is managed by Maureen Howland, a long-term member of the PCNet Task Group, who is the Manager of out Facebook page and Newsletter Editor. Maureen will advise the ELC Office Administrator (Judi Maschmedt) of any email address changes required in mail-outs to PCNet members. Your privacy is ensured during this process.

Just as importantly, we recognise that staying connected is about more than keeping contact details current. Sometimes the content of the presentations we bring month-by-month may incline you to share with one of the Task Group members, listed in this newsletter — you may be enthused or disturbed by what you've heard, or maybe just want to talk about it. If something in a PCForum presentation intersects with what is happening in your life, and you would like to share with a listening ear or as pastoral care, please feel welcome to get in touch as above. and Maureen will arrange for you to be contacted by a member of the Task Group.

There is no expectation for you to share anything you would prefer to keep private.

We simply want everyone to know that they are valued members of the network, and that confidential pastoral support, as distinct from counselling, is available when needed.

Thank you for helping to keep our records current and, more importantly, for being part of a network that seeks to care for one another.

Let's continue to keep in touch and make space for one another.

Esmond Dowdy, for the PCNet Task Group