

# CHURCH FUTURES

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## **Why I did a thesis on the future of the Uniting Church in Australia**

“I did this thesis because just over a decade ago, I did a big report on aged care for the Uniting Church. What was interesting is that although the Uniting Church is the largest single provider of aged care, the parishes that were involved with the oversight of aged care, were actually in decline.

I had done a Masters degree in religious studies at the University of Sydney 25 years ago and I was invited to go back and do a PhD.

I took early retirement from Wesley Mission and used this as an opportunity to look at where the Uniting Church had come from. I was involved right from the very beginning with the organisation of the original procession.

I was able to use this as an opportunity to explore where the Uniting Church had come from and why the hopes and visions and dreams that we had, back in 1977, are now all crumbling.

The research was drawn mainly from my own experience so it's a different type of research from most PhD research, which is where people do the research from outside and then interview a lot of the participants – I'm an insider so I was able to do it as a participant observer. All the documents I used in the research are in the public domain. There are no internal documents.

What I wanted to do was to help the Uniting Church to look at why things are turning out sour, and how we can look towards the future. It's not my job to predict how things are going to go. As a Scenario Planner I'm simply providing four different scenarios – if I've done my job properly one of these four scenarios will come into play.”

Dr Keith Suter