

LESLEY McMULLIN AND THE UCF

Yvonne Smith

This is a small personal tribute to two separate entities of the Church which we can no longer enjoy; one, a much loved person, the other an organisation which became somewhat of an anachronism, but which, to my mind personified the spirit of mission within a Christian community.

Lesley and Bruce McMullin were leaders par excellence in the work of this church over many long years, but it is Lesley I want to remember today. Although she would always describe herself as just an ordinary wife and mother, as we all know, she was much more than that. Her commitment to her faith was so strong that even with her husband, home and four young children to care for, she found the time and strength to return to study and become a deaconess, eventually to serve as a chaplain in hospitals, and also as an associate Minister in this church. Her compassion and understanding of peoples' needs was deep and freely shared, and when Lesley led in prayer it was truly "soul satisfying" to all who heard her.

However, for me it was her love of fun and her wicked sense of humour that I appreciated and remembers so well!

One day she told me that fairly early in her married life, she attended a large ecumenical gathering of women at one of the inner city churches, and in making conversation with one of them. She was asked if she had any children. "Yes, I have four" she replied. "My goodness", the woman exclaimed. "You must belong to the Catholic group over there." "Oh no", said Lesley, "We're just passionate Presbyterians." Vintage Lesley!!

In 1977 the Uniting Church was created with the combining of the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian denominations. The Denbigh Road Presbyterian and the Armadale Methodist congregations combined, and eventually chose the Kooyong Road, Armadale church as their new Uniting Church home. The Women's Mission Groups from each church also combined to become a branch of the newly formed Australia-wide Uniting Church Adult Fellowship. This was around 1979, and brings me to the second reason for this tribute. Lesley, very soon after its formation, became President of Armadale UCAF, which then played a leading part in this church's work of Mission for many years. The UCAF had quite a large membership for many years, but when around the 1990s economic hardship was affecting many families, membership numbers dropped sharply as women began to take up work outside the home to augment family incomes. However, our annual donations to Prahran Mission, UC Frontier Services, Share Community Appeal, Shalom Christina College (a Queensland college for outback aboriginal boys), the Leprosy Mission and many others were continued with the aid of interest earned on bequests from former members, trading tables and our own contributions. Norma McNolty stocked our trading table with her craft work, which was much in demand, and jams and cakes were provided by other members. An annual event was our Birthday Luncheon in June, and all the local church women were invited, from Catholic through to Seventh Day Adventists, making it a great ecumenical event. Sometimes up to 80 people sat down to a three course lunch, followed by an interesting stall or demonstration, all catered for and managed by perhaps 6 or 8 very tired Armadale UCF members.



As our membership dwindled (almost to vanishing point) from 2005 onwards, we had to be less ambitious in our public efforts, but still managed to continue in support of our charities.

Eventually we had only 4 or 5 regular members left, and kept up our monthly meetings solely to provide a regular social event for Norma, who by then was housebound. We still had great times of fellowship and sharing together.

I am very proud of our Armadale UCF, and as its president for the last few years, I would like to say thank you to Betty Terrell, our treasurer for some years, and to all who faithfully worked to uphold the Mission work of this church, and in so doing provided a great core of loving Christian fellowship for so many. It was a joy to belong and work with them all and it is good to see that Australia wide the work of UCAF is still being carried on today.

(This article originally appeared in the September 2014 issue of *The Mustard Seed*, which also contained some more pictures).