

# the **PRESBYTERIAN** pulse

## Hymns of REJOICE! - ing in Armidale



**INSIDE:**

- ▶ **ASSEMBLY 2022: IT'S ON IN JULY ONLINE AND IN-PERSON**
- ▶ **TEACHING SCHOOLS ALLIANCE: EQUIPPING THE NEXT GEN OF CHRISTIAN TEACHERS**
- ▶ **PROFILE DAVID MAHER: OUR MODERATOR FOR 2022-23**
- ▶ **ADRIAN LAMROCK: BOWING OUT AFTER "BLESSED" MODERATORSHIP**
- ▶ **REFLECTION: ANDREW CAMPBELL ON "SWALLOWS IN THE SHED"**

**PLUS: APWM, BIBLICAL CHURCH PLANTING WITH BEN SMITH, PY, APWM NSW, METRO, PETER BARNES, SRE AND MORE**

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COVER: Armidale hosted Charles Abel and Richard Ward (organist) from Inverell Presbyterian Church in April to sing songs from REJOICE! Charles had been minister at St Paul's for 16 years (1982-1998) and had been one of the five ministers on the committee who had put together REJOICE! which was first published in July 1987.

# Editorial

BY KAREN FORMAN

## Disasters of Biblical proportions

Today's mainstream media seems to thrive on headlines about disaster. It is more and more difficult to find any news report which has a positive slant; good news stories don't seem to get any "column centimetres" anymore. As a result, humans have become so desensitised that we seem to need to be fed more horror, more gore, more emotion, more negativity, before we react; before in some cases, we even seem to care.

Two years of disasters, a period which began with bushfires, continued with the pandemic, had a mouse plague thrown in and have more recently included floods and the war in Ukraine, have seen the tragic loss of life and property in our states, country and over the sea.

Along with reports of the disasters have been media and social media-fed speculation on the "cause" of the floods, fires and disease. Vaccination, global warming, climate change, politics, God, a lack of God; you name it, people are looking for somebody or something to blame.

Even the most ardent Christians find it difficult at times to make sense of all the disasters that have befallen us, particularly when they have affected our own so hugely – like damage to property and life in the Northern NSW floods.

I gained a little perspective a couple of days ago, however, when a Christian friend in his late 70s popped by to visit me in the office, carrying his Bible.

"You know, I've been reading my Bible a bit lately," he announced. "I don't read it enough, but I have to stop reading the News, because



it is all rubbish. The thing is, that you read the Bible and what is it full of? Stories of famine, flood, pestilence, locusts, disease, fire . . . all the things that have been happening now.

Nothing has changed really. It's just the way we look at it, talk about it and blame everyone for. We need to look at the Bible and see the hope and maybe even the purpose and how we can use these times for the Good."

My friend is spot on. The Bible tells us that disaster is part of a natural cycle, that God is in control, that we have hope and that we can use tough times to reflect and honour Him.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1 we read: "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

So we can rest knowing that God is in control and we have a bright future.

The Bible also tells us how to get through these times ourselves.

Romans 12:12: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

He has hinted at what Christians should do during tough times.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14: "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

In this edition we report on horror of the floods. But through it, we can see a great deal of hope.

# Armidale's afternoon of hymns from REJOICE!

BY DAVID MOEN

**St Paul's Presbyterian Church Armidale welcomed Rev Charles Abel (retired) and Richard Ward (organist) from Inverell Presbyterian Church in April.**

What a great afternoon of singing hymns from "REJOICE!" it was!

Charles had been minister at St Paul's for 16 years (1982-1998) and had been one of the five ministers on the committee who had put together this book, which was first published in July 1987.

Charles had chosen nine hymns and all were sung with much gusto. He introduced each hymn and spoke briefly about its historical background, its writer and the music used in that hymn.

He began by saying, "There have been many times in history when God has poured out His blessing upon His people – and when He has - He has put a song in their mouth - He did it 3000 years ago in Jerusalem in the time of King David - and today we have the rich heritage of the Psalms of David - He did it again in 16th Century Europe in the Reformation when, in the free city of Geneva in the 1550s, Christian scholars and musicians inspired by the Spirit of God translated

the old Psalms of David set them in verse so that folk could sing them in the fine tunes they had written – and here we have them in our hands today in the Scottish Psalter of 1650."

So, the first hymn was No.14 which is Psalm 150 from the Psalter of 1650, and the last Hymn 252.

In between, the gathering was told how Timothy Dudley-Smith in 1962 was reading Luke 2:40 (Mary's "Magnificat") in the New English Bible and was inspired to write HYMN 168 in REJOICE- "Tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord", and how Jean Sibelius' moving music from "Finlandia" came to be used to accompany our HYMN 558, "Be still my soul the Lord is on your side".

Richard played the National Anthem of Ukraine and also an "Organ Interlude", so Rev Charles could have a spell from his dissertation.

Not since Heather Moen-Boyd's organ recitals in the church before the pandemic has the grand organ "had such a work-out" from the skills of an organist that afternoon.

He was magnificent! Our church commends this blessed one hour of praises to our Lord to other congregations.



Minister Rev David Seaman is in the centre, with Rev Charles Abel on his left and Rev Peter Thorneycroft on his right. Peter was the Minister at Inverell Presbyterian Church for 15 years. (1985 to 2001), but is now a member of St Paul's Armidale.

## Gathering to remember the late Peter Graham

COVID-19 Public Health restrictions meant that many funerals were unable to be attended by many during the past two years, including that of post PCNSW/ACT Moderator, Peter Graham.

Peter died on July 31 2021, aged 77 after suffering a stroke.

However, family and friends will have the chance to gather to remember Peter at a memorial to be held on Saturday July 30, at the Scots Presbyterian Church Sydney at 2:30pm.

Peter's daughter Lizzy says the invitation is open to all who would like to remember and honour her father.

"Everyone who would like to come along is welcome," she said.

To read the Pulse tribute to Peter, visit <https://pcnsw.org.au/2021/09/17/pulse-september-october-2021/>



# Fast forward to Assembly 2022: In person or on Zoom

BY KAREN FORMAN

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**Commissioners to this year's General Assembly New South Wales (GANSW) will be able to participate in person at PLC Sydney, or via Zoom.**

The Business Committee made the decision to conduct the Assembly in a hybrid manner due to the ongoing concerns regarding COVID-19 and the uptake of the Zoom technology at the last two Assemblies.



Adrian Lamrock and family

Assembly is scheduled to start Monday evening July 11 at 7pm in the PLC Auditorium. During the Opening Service, the Moderator Nominate, the Rev David Maher will be officially elected Moderator.

Across the following days the Assembly will discharge its three primary functions.

- Its administrative function takes expression in dealing with reports and recommendations of its various committees appointed to fulfil the diverse work of the Assembly in an operational manner throughout the year.
- Its legislative function is on display in enacting new or amended rules and regulations which become part of The Code.
- Its judicial function is discharged if decisions of presbyteries or sessions are reviewed via any appeals or complaints, or if any disciplinary matters are referred to the Assembly.

Keep an eye out for full reports on the Assembly, as well as the incoming and outgoing Moderators' addresses, in the August-September edition of The Pulse magazine.

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## Brittney first Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney grad

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**The Scots College formed the Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney (TSAS) with St Andrew's Cathedral School, Blue Mountains Grammar School, William Clarke College, Inaburra School and tertiary education provider, Alphcrucius College in 2019.**

Students combine their teaching studies with on-the-job training with each member school. A critical part of this program is that participating students (school leavers or career changers) must have an active Christian faith.

The TSAS seeks to equip and grow the next gener-

ation of Christian teachers and leaders for Australian schools. Scots' Principal, Dr Ian PM Lambert is proud that The Scots College is part of the alliance and has produced its first graduate:

"This is a huge step forward in continuing to reinvent the landscape of education for the next generation of teachers and educators across Sydney. All the participants are exceptional in their field," he said.

Now in its third year, the organization has grown, with 22 teacher trainees placed across six schools, studying either a Masters of Teaching or Bachelor of Education.



First graduate of the TSAS program Brittany Shapcott, who completed her traineeship at Scots college in 2021. Brittany is now a full-time employee of the college. Brittany is fourth from the right, front row.

The Scots College currently has seven trainees, supported by mentor teachers across four campuses overseen by school coordinator Jason Corbett-Jones, and in 2022 welcomed Brittany Shapcott as a full-time employee of the College.

Miss Shapcott completed her traineeship at Scots from 2020 until 2021 and is the first graduate of the TSAS program.

She shares her reflections on the experience below.

### **How has the TSAS program prepared you for teaching?**

“One of the most evident ways the TSAS program prepared me for teaching was in growing my confidence. On my first day of full-time teaching, I felt like I belonged in the classroom and knew it was where I was supposed to be (a significant change from how I was feeling on the first day of the program). This allowed me to immediately focus on building relationships with the students rather than spending lots of time trying to locate myself within the school.”

### **Highlights of the past two years?**

“One of the things that stood out to me was how much I enjoyed and appreciated doing the TSAS journey alongside other Trainee Teachers! Being part of a close cohort with a strong sense of community was a unique experience that shaped my teacher training in the best possible way. Another highlight unique to the TSAS experience was developing strong and lasting relationships with the

students in my classes. Unlike a typical practicum experience, where you get to know students over three weeks and then leave, I had the privilege of seeing the same students every week for a year!

“Another significant highlight for me personally was feeling like the call and pull I felt toward teaching were confirmed and validated. Throughout my two years in the TSAS program, I felt a strong sense of assurance that teaching was absolutely the right career for me, but even more than that, I felt like I had discovered my vocation. This deep vocational conviction makes the more challenging days more hopeful and the joyful days even more meaningful.”

### **What are you most looking forward to as a full-time teacher at Scots?**

“I’m so excited to be at the beginning of my teaching journey. For the past two years, I feel like we have talked about and envisioned the type of teachers we were aiming to be, and so it is now very exciting to begin to outwork that. I’m looking forward to trialing the different ideas we learned about along the way to find the most effective and impactful teaching practice for each of my classes.

“I’m so thankful that I have spent the past two years completing my training at Scots because it has made the transition to being a new full-time teacher so smooth. I’m very excited to work in a school with such a clear vision for reinventing education, forming character, and creating holistic educational experiences.”

# Working hard to secure Allowah's future

BY JANETTE BAKER



**Commissioners to this year's General Assembly New South Wales (GANSW) will be able to participate in person at PLC Sydney, or via Zoom.**

Allowah Presbyterian Children's Hospital is a unique ministry within the Presbyterian Church of NSW/ACT. Supporting children with complex disabilities and medical needs, Allowah has a distinctive opportunity to show the love of Jesus to the children and families who use the service. These families often come to Allowah completely exhausted and feeling very much alone. Many of the children require around-the-clock care. Some children come to Allowah for the day or the weekend, other children live at Allowah and Allowah is their home. Allowah is a lifeline for these families, as there is literally nowhere else that provides the level of care these children need.

COVID-19 had a huge financial impact on Allowah. Many programs that financially support the core business had to be closed due to government-imposed restrictions on admissions and access, and in order to keep the children safe as they are particularly susceptible to respiratory illnesses. In 2021,

Allowah gratefully received a \$200,000 grant from NSW Department of Communities and Justice, and \$62,000 in 2022. However, the loss of revenue over the last two years means that they are running out of internal resources and the future of Allowah is at stake. Two million dollars is needed to see them through to the end of this year and start them on the road to recovery.

## **Conversations with government continue**

Allowah received a visit from Minister Anne Ruston and local Liberal candidate Maria Kovacic prior to



**Mother Kimberley with Grace talking to Minister Ruston and Maria Kovacic**



**Presbyterian Church Volunteers  
hosting Kids' Church at Allowah**

the federal election. Senator Ruston announced that the Federal government would donate two million dollars to Allowah if the Morrison Government was returned to office. The subsequent outcome of the election means that the promised \$2million dollars is now off the cards, however Allowah continues to reach out to both sides of parliament in the hope of obtaining funding help.

### **Outpouring of support**

It has been so encouraging for the staff and families at Allowah, to witness the support received from hundreds of people who have been praying, donating and fundraising for Allowah. At the time of publication, \$600,000 has been raised since the beginning of April.

"We have been just blown away by the outpouring of support, prayers, donations and the people getting behind us with their own fundraising campaigns. It's such an answer to prayer", says Liz McClean, Allowah's CEO.

### **A vital ministry**

Allowah's Chaplain, Rochelle Wainwright, explains how Allowah is like a family. Particularly for the kids that spend the majority of their time there. "There are kids who have been coming here for so many years" she says. "They have grown up together, they know each other. They smile when they see their friend being wheeled into the room. So for these kids, if Allowah wasn't here, it would be like they've been ripped apart from an extended family. How would they understand not seeing these friends they've grown up with?"

When asked about the impact of Allowah, as a ministry, on the children at Allowah, Rochelle explains, "Allowah is their church. On Sundays they get to have Kids' Church and we have some visiting Presbyterian Churches who come to do Kids' Church with them. And we belong to those Presbyterian Churches. We are family to them here at Allowah. The kids belong to their church. They have watched the kids grow in loving Jesus over the years. And this would be lost if we didn't have Allowah."

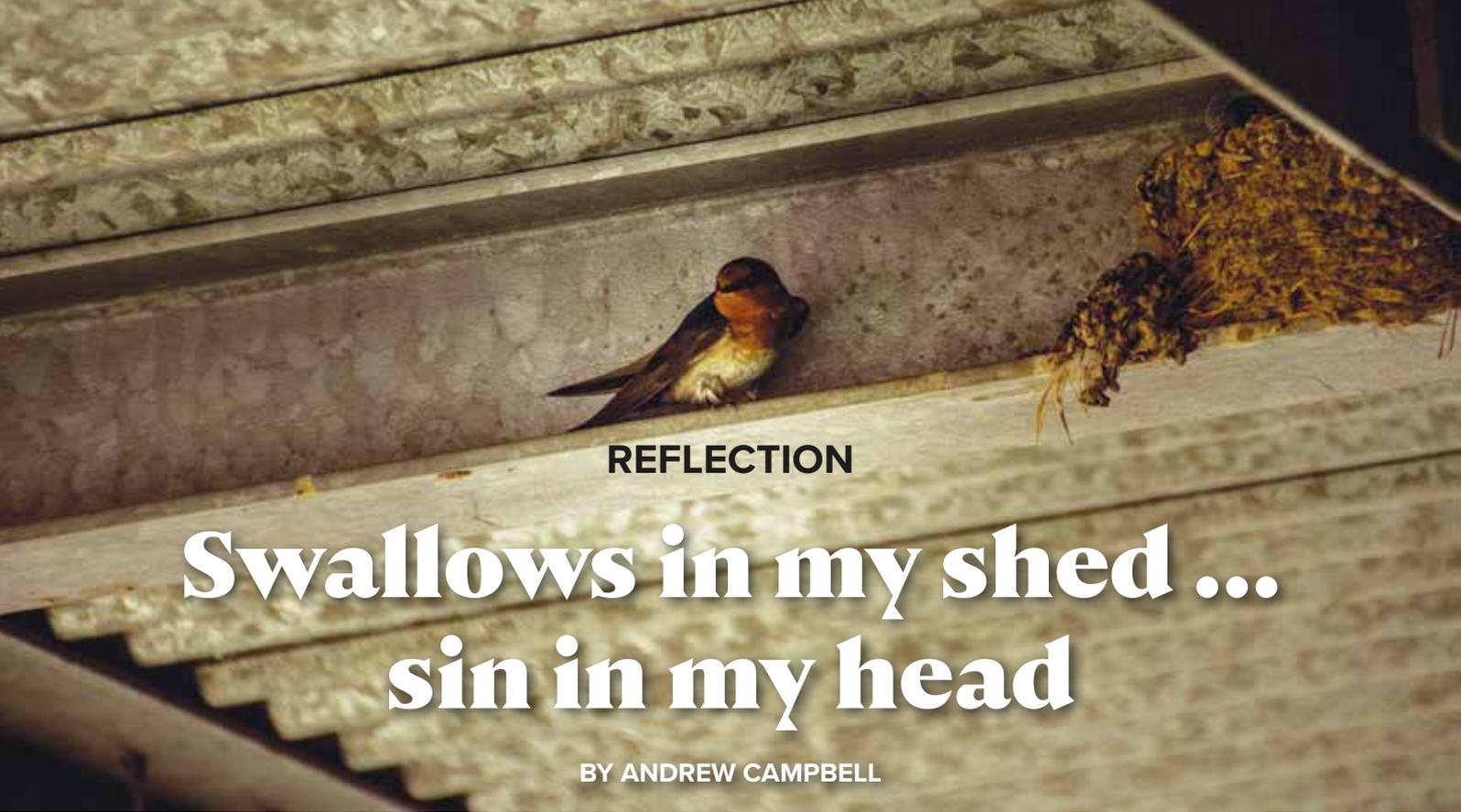


**Chaplain Rochelle and child at Allowah**

As Allowah continues to work hard to secure its future, please pray for this important ministry.

Visit [www.Allowah.org.au](http://www.Allowah.org.au) to find out more or make a donation.





REFLECTION

# Swallows in my shed ... sin in my head

BY ANDREW CAMPBELL

**W**e've got swallows in our shed. It started in spring. A pair of swallows made a beautiful mud nest in a corner of my shed. They lined it with soft dandelions, and wool from our sheep. Soon there were three beautiful, tiny eggs. Then, three tiny chicks, and very busy parents flying in and out of the shed, feeding their hungry brood.



Uninvited, sure. But the bitterness came. And with its poisonous relatives of anger and revenge.

Swallows in my shed. Sin in my head.

For a while I enjoyed it, there, in the corner of my mind. I nursed it. Looked after it. Fed it with tidbits, 'Next time I see him ...' I enjoyed planning what I would say and do. And it wasn't too much of a big deal. There in a corner of my mind. Like the swallows. Harmless. Cute ...

I didn't see the chicks leave the nest but they grew up and left home and I assumed that was the end of my family.

No way! With summer, they came back - and invited their cousins and aunts, their second cousins and friends and more.

So we no longer had a cute family in the shed. We had a growing colony of swallows. My shed was a dry shelter from the rain and a safe place from hawks overhead. And before long 20 or 30 swallows happily roosted overnight - and did what swallows do on the car, the shelving, my tools and floor.

Like a centimetre of the stuff in places. And the mess! The smell!

We've got swallows in our shed.

They got me thinking about a deep hurt that we have experienced recently. A very personal relationship broken, and apparently beyond repair. A hurt that began to fester.

Well, I'd better fess up and name it for what it soon became. Bitterness. Unforgiveness. Okay, okay, sin.

But the author of Hebrews challenges me:

Hebrews 12:14-15: "14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

I have to face the issue squarely and honestly. Call it what my Lord calls it, sin. Confess it. Take it to the cross, to Jesus. Be sure, as I can be, of His grace and forgiveness. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill me with love, joy, peace, patience and more. I must pray for strength. Practise a gentle answer. Think through what my Lord Jesus would say and do next time we meet. A kind word. To bless him, not curse. And more ...

Certainly harder than shooing my swallows out. Cleaning up the mess, and putting up netting to keep them out.

But I gotta do it. And just as I had to get rid of the swallows in my shed, I have to get rid of the sin in my head ... or that mess will only grow.

# WE ARE PART OF SOMETHING MUCH LARGER THAN WE THINK

This will be the last of my columns as Moderator of the General Assembly for 2021-2022.

Looking back, I can certainly say that Kerrie and I have been greatly blessed by the number of people we've met and places we've visited.



Everywhere we've turned, from churches to aged care facilities to schools to committee meetings to Christ College, we have found people with a great desire to serve Jesus and to see that people get to hear about Him.

It has also been humbling to have been welcomed in so many places and with such graciousness.

One of the things that I have felt it important to do is to encourage people to see themselves as part of something much larger than, say, their local church or their particular aged care facility. For we are part of something much larger, and that, of course, is the universal church centred around Jesus.

It's also been interesting for me to understand that many in our churches have a limited understanding of what it is to be part of the Presbyterian Church in NSW and the ACT. Many, similarly, have little idea of what the role of Moderator involves (how often have I heard the word "bishop" when I've been interviewed?!) so it's been good to have the chance to share that each congregation is part of a state-wide network of around 180 churches, meeting in, for example, English, Arabic, Indonesian, Samoan, Korean and Mandarin.

I don't think that, prior to commencing my role as Moderator, I had any idea of the diversity of languages and cultures the PCNSW involves.

And while I have some understanding, and experience, of our schools, it has been eye-opening, and an enormous encouragement to me, as a former

teacher, to see how our schools are taking their Gospel mission seriously.

It was a privilege to attend the Graduation Ceremony at Christ College and to issue Exit Certificates to men who will be, or are already, in ministry roles across the state and I was delighted to see students from one of our schools receiving Certificates in Theology at the same ceremony.

Similarly, I've had some experience of our aged care facilities but to spend time with the staff, directors of nursing and chaplains, I have been given a greater awareness of how these staff love and care for their residents in Jesus' name. To see the relationship between residents and carers has been great.

And there are other organisations which, if I haven't mentioned them, I apologise because they are numerous and my truncated timetable (remember we were in lockdown for some months in 2021) has not let me make connections with them. Think of PWA, PIM, PY, APWM and Jericho Road, just to name some.

The year has given me a much greater understanding of the breadth and depth of the work of this denomination across NSW. I am grateful for this.

I also encourage us all to find out about the organisations, committees and institutions which operate under our "Presbyterian-blue" umbrella! (I'm sure that's a colour. I now have a couple of ties with that shade in them!!) Perhaps you could pray for them. Perhaps you could support them. I encourage you to look at how you can learn about and serve the wider work of the PCNSW in the days ahead.

Thank you, finally, for those who have been an encouragement to Kerrie and to me as we have worked among you. May the Lord continue to bless His people and their efforts.

# David Maher, Moderator-nominate

## “quietly terrified but trusting in the Lord”

BY KAREN FORMAN

**Ask Moderator-nominate David Maher how he’s feeling about taking on the role at the 2022 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW/ACT, and he will admit that he is “quietly terrified (but) trusting in the Lord.”**

As all the Moderators before him know, it is a big job. One that you need to be nominated for and one that you need to accept. And will usually spend weeks if not months, in prayer and contemplation before accepting. It is considered an honour, but most Moderators will say that they end up accepting because they feel it was God’s will ... and often have anxiety about it.

David, minister at Burwood Presbyterian Church, where he has been since 2003, is no exception.

“The nomination came from another minister in the denomination, he nominated me last year as well. In both cases, I am a reluctant nominee, but I view much in ministry is it as my duty in fulfilling my call as a minister. So I sought counsel and advice from others, and by the grace of God we’ll see how it lands,” he says.

“It is something you don’t know what to expect until it happens, and at that point you respond, keep calm and carry on – which was my advice to everyone in the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a great honour to be nominated; I just pray that I can fulfil the role in a God-honouring way.”

David, whose role will be to moderate over the Assembly in July (which is being offered to delegates as a face-to-face event at PLC Sydney or over Zoom) and then to spend the next 12 months visiting presbyteries and churches, does believe, however, that the Church must be ready to respond rapidly to the needs of a changing world.

“I have a sense that our world is changing at the moment in ways that people are not prepared for,” he says. “We may soon face rolling blackouts, fuel shortages, supermarkets with empty shelves, and hyperinflation. Regional conflict is also a real possibility.

“Most of us have never known any other monarch on the throne but Queen Elizabeth. When she dies, it will mark the end of an era. So the kind of issues confronting us as Christians, whether it’s gender



David Maher

fluidity, or any of these issues, I think it is important as a denomination we be prepared for what lies ahead and have something to say, whether that’s to government or whoever, representing our denomination in the event of a call from the media. And we need to do that without losing our focus on Christ.”

“I think it’s my role to help the Assembly do its business and do it well. The real challenge is the unknown about what may happen in the world and

how we respond.”

David describes himself as a person who needs to get out of the city to refresh, enjoys bushwalking, nature, reading, reflecting... “mostly what I do these days is go for a drive, get out of the city. The closest thing to hobby I picked up during COVID was building lots of nano block projects.

Born in Epping but growing up an only child in Lismore the son of a Catholic father and a Church of England mum, David at the age of 13 or 14 was sent to confirmation camp with the Anglican church as were many kids of my age. I remember that the preacher gave an altar call, and I went forward and gave my life to Jesus.”

He finished High School, graduated from Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education with a double major in computing and accounting and was also touring with a rock band, Tiger, between Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast, playing the bass guitar, from 1983 to 1985.

“It wasn’t until I started work with IBM at about 22 years of age, when I was really of the view of ‘why am I still thinking of myself as a Christian’...I was ready to walk away from any semblance of faith ... but there was a situation where a project I was working on had some very major problems and I found myself being framed for doing things I didn’t do. I was very stressed and had to keep a diary of everything I said and did.

“One day I was whinging at the coffee machine about my sad state of affairs to a colleague who listened for 20 mins solid, and only really said one thing: “you will find your answer in God you know”, then turned around and left me holding my coffee.”

At home in share accommodation, with one guy who was a Christian, he was invited to attend an evangelistic event at his church that night. “It was like the hand of God on my shoulder saying mate,



BPC Church Camp Oct 2020

come and listen. John Smith, a motorcycle evangelist preached the Gospel in a way I understood it and that was the way I became a Christian with understanding faith.

“It was a recognition that my life is utterly broken but there is a God who loves me and loves me to death. That recognition that I can be forgiven and loved by God.

“Two years later I had my first overseas business trip to Singapore with IBM, which was how I met my wife.

Suat-Har, who now works for Presbyterian Church Offices, was living in Singapore, so David proposed to her quickly and 18 months later they got married in Singapore and then returned to Australia.

“We began a bit of a journey of different congregations for a while: Baptist, congregational, then I started going to Bible College,” he says. “It was a sense of taking the next step, God was calling me to be equipped, be prepared for whatever He had planned next.”

He graduated from Moore College in 1999 and

then in his final year started with Eugene Hor at the Chinese Church at the English-speaking service when the transition happened from congregational to Presbyterian in his fourth year. Then he had to do another two years of Presbyterian study before ordination, finishing in 2001 at then PTC, now Christ College.

“I was looking at a missionary role, maybe in south east Asia. I was at no stage thinking particularly I want to be a minister of a church; it was more the sense there was a pathway God had put us on. I began with the Chinese Presbyterian church at Burwood, before stepping across to the Presbyterian Church as its minister. And that was it!”

The Burwood congregation is diverse in terms of ethnic makeup, with about 75 people in regular attendance. “Most of our regulars were born outside of Australia. It is a congregation of the nations, which is part of the vision of our church, reflective of who we are.”

David still picks up the guitar occasionally, joining with regular musicians in church.



BPC Sunday 5 June 2022



## Support Services in Missions: Peter Burke SIM and APWM Nigeria

Peter Burke served as the Business Manager at PLC Sydney for 20 years, retiring early.

His interest lay in full time mission work. In March 2005 he took on the role of treasurer for SIM in Nigeria, West Africa. Along the way, as is common with many missionaries, he collected a range of support tasks, not all finance-themed.

In global mission, support roles include any activity that assists missionaries to arrive in their place of service, and to thrive in a cross-cultural context so that they can focus on their primary task of making Christ known.

These support and facilitator roles are expressed in diverse functions that may not be immediately obvious. Field missionaries in leadership roles like having administrative and technical support missionaries working alongside them - such people take pressure off the leaders.

In Nigeria, where SIM has operated since 1893, the mission agency provides support services that include construction, education, finance, compliance with overseas and local laws, immigration matters, governance, and maintenance of IT systems.

SIM also provides teachers for a mission school so that parents can be released for ministry. Peter's focus is finance, which can be a vexed area in the secular context as well as in Christian ministry. Just think of what Scripture says about money!

When Peter arrived in Nigeria, he thought he would be involved in finance and not much else - he thought he would run a finance office, and coach missionaries, junior and senior, on how to manage funds entrusted to them in God honoring ways.

That lasted a few days. Very quickly there came the overarching management of projects and ministries that have legal accountability back to countries supplying funds.



Governments rightly expect donated funds sent overseas to be used appropriately. This also includes interactions with vulnerable people.

As time moved along, and Peter became more culturally aware, his work included sitting on boards of ministries that received SIM monies, or had missionaries inserted into structures run by a large indigenous church known as ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All). This included long standing ministries plus universities, hospitals and seminaries.

This led to many meetings in which he could help passionate people understand the accountability that is expected by the Christian community and by secular authorities. Peter was very thankful for verses like 2 Corinthians 8:21, where Paul reminds us that we must do right with gifts in the eyes of God and man.

These days Peter supports SIM remotely together with annual visits of three to four months. His support roles include acting in leadership roles while people take holidays, board meetings and supporting missionaries seeking to reach out to more than 100 million Muslims located mainly in Northern region of Nigeria. He also mentors Christian accountants, encouraging them to solve problems from a Christian perspective. Another task that Peter took on was management of a mutual car insurance fund for about 400 vehicles used by missionaries located in 26 countries on the continent of Africa.

It can be a challenge to ensure accountability when resources are sent into majority world cultures, where relationships are far more valued than documentation.

If, for example, you ask for a receipt, the response in many places is "How much do you want the receipt for?" Or sometimes, "We do not issue receipts." What is reasonable in these situations? When financial accountability issues arise, there can be tough decisions to make.

But there is blessing in the many opportunities and in seeing how a collection of missionaries work together to undertake the work prepared in advance by our gracious God for them to do. *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you.... each part should have equal concerns for one another."* 1 Corinthians 12:21, 25.

The list of support tasks goes on. Any accountants with a mission mind-set, be aware you are needed!



## Serving Church and Community in Austria: Michelle and Andrew Blumer

At the beginning of 2020, our lives took a big turn not just because of the effects of COVID but also because of illness in our family. At that time, I wrote these verses on a piece of paper and stuck them on our bedroom door.

*“Endure hardship as a discipline....no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*  
Hebrews 12:7, 11-12

The promise that hardship would bring a harvest of righteousness and peace was reassuring but still I spent the first year and a half of COVID waiting for the end, watching the news and rising figures and hoping for a breakthrough in medicine. I was definitely more focussed on what man could do in the situation rather than on what God was doing.

Last year (2021) our church was told that we could no longer use the place where we had been meeting for the past 12 years. It was a shock and felt like bad timing. In late 2021 yet another lockdown was announced. How long was this going to go on? We needed to decide whether to teach online or shut down during lockdown. We were tired physically and emotionally from the ups and downs of the last years.

Yet how many times in our 17 years in Austria had we had things happen that we thought were bad but over time brought blessing and a harvest of righteousness? There had been many health issues, team, family and church dramas in the past where we now can see God’s hand clearly.

We closed the business in the last lockdown and I spent the three weeks reading, reflecting and relaxing. I was convicted of my reliance on man rather than on God. I was waiting on man to intervene and find a cure instead of trusting in God. My change in attitude meant making less plans for the future, or holding to them more loosely and trusting more in God for the day to day.

Our church showed a great attitude. They saw the church as the people and not the building. Although there were many memories in the building, they were not attached to it. We found a great convention hotel to meet in. The convention hotel has great facilities, and we don’t have to set up or pack up! There is a café and many sit there after church discussing our week and the service.

Our English students have stuck with us over the past years of lockdowns and regulations. We are so thankful for our 80 students aged from four-82 years old. These students have shown great hope and resilience and are an encouragement to us. Learning English has given many of them a community and routine that has helped them though. Many of our older students comment on how important the English class is to them. These students have become like a family to us as we share our lives with each other.

What will 2022 bring? God only knows but I am already seeing some results of God’s training of us though this time and I look forward to looking back in the years to come and praising Him for the harvest of righteousness and peace that he has produced in us and others in Vienna.

- Michelle Blumer along with husband Andrew are working with the local church in Vienna, Austria and teaching English in the community – in partnership with APWM and Pioneers.



APWM NSW First Sunday in hotel 2021



REFLECTION

# Let's celebrate Biblical church planting

BY BEN SMITH

C

hurch planting is great, it's Biblical and it grows God's kingdom. We all know stories of a fantastic plant that has done awesome things. We should celebrate church planting!

It's worth considering however, whether all church planting is always Biblical? Does all church planting always advance the kingdom?

Planters will complain of course of 'cold welcomes' and 'territorial behaviour' from local churches (sometimes justifiably so). Could it be, however, sometimes, planting churches do not always behave in Biblical ways?

Questioning church planting strategies is not a politically correct question, yet if some of the rumours are true, it's one that needs exploring.

Does 21st century Australian church planting match what we see in the Bible?

## **Biblical church planting, an example: Acts 14**

21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

## **Church planters proclaim the Gospel and make disciples**

Verse 21 is clear, Churches are established by the proclamation of the gospel, (to non-believers). Verse 22, also clear, those fresh disciples are then subsequently strengthened and encouraged in their faith in Christ. That is to say, the new disciples are 'discipled'. Verse 23, These believers are then incorporated and committed into a

newly established local church 'elders for them', (a church governed by locally appointed elders).

Can Biblical church planting, include a strategically chosen team from a sending church who arrive together in a new town to share the gospel? Yes, it can! This is exactly what we see Paul and Barnabas do in verses 26 to 28. Paul certainly doesn't do his planting work on his own. Paul needs a team.

Biblical church planting, however, is not overtly and covertly recruiting believers from existing local churches.

## **Planting is proclamation, it's not pilfering**

This is undoubtedly what the Bible says because we get the repeated assertion that Biblical planters, like Paul, strengthen, not weaken, local churches.

Biblical church planting is not 'parasitic'. Biblical planting does not gut one church for the sake of another. There is no destructive wake following Paul and Barnabas's planting work. No, local churches are strengthened by planters, not closed by planters.

Here is a quick Biblical check. The next time you meet a church planter, check to see how he is strengthening local churches.

## **Biblical ecclesiology...**

Colossians and its accompanying tangible example, Philemon, serve as a good example of biblical ecclesiology. The local Colossian church is governed by grace that comes from Christ.

Christ brings reconciliation to all things and this reconciliation is then applied to the local church. Paul calls on the Colossians, by grace, to 'bear with each other'. Unity in the local body is fundamental to our new identity in Christ.

This is certainly supported by the book of Philemon. Philemon is a letter not just to a person but to a church.

A breakdown in relationship between one believer is a breakdown in all believers.

The Gospel is lived out when Philemon welcomes back his brother Onesimus, not just to himself but into the Colossian Church community.

Paul asserts relationship breakdowns should be reconciled and reunited within a church family. At no point do the Epistles encourage believers to find the coolest church or to resolve issues in Corinth by going to church in Ephesus.

Church is a covenantal community, a family, people are saved to be part of not consume until the plant up the road can recruit people to something better.

### **Contrast to Biblical planting - a common Australian story.**

Circulated quietly among devastated pastors and churches, is the wake left by questionable church planting.

The headlines of a questionable church plant read well. Gifted staff, godly people, rapid growth. Those headlines are all true. Planters are still on about Jesus Christ, their doctrine is sound, their evangelism is incredible, and their intentions are, almost always, pure.

What appears to be never told, is the consequences to others and the kingdom. Behind the 'success story', there is, sometimes, a tale of destruction.

Every questionable church plant is different of course, but here are some common themes

#### **1. They've come to tell the people of your town the Gospel (because you aren't)**

It's widely trumpeted, (and all churches should be glad about gospel proclamation). What is also often said, or implied is, other churches are not on about the gospel, despite there being multiple churches doing great gospel ministry in your town.

#### **2. The questionable plant happens next to a gospel church**

There are innumerable nearby towns and suburbs without an evangelical church (or any church at all), but for some reason, nearby to your church is the place to be.



christine—unsplash

Obviously too much gospel ministry in one place is never enough, so we can't be negative, but, it's interesting the location they choose. Ten towns go unreached so the planter can be precisely next to you. What made this location so suitable? Was it the Gospel or the chance of greater 'successes'?

Two planters from the same denomination don't plant next door to each other, no they coordinate so as not to unintentionally undo each other's good work. Raw 'success' is not the goal. Kingdom growth is.

Planters sometimes fail to see the bigger picture in a town. If their denominational flag does not fly, they must be the one to plant it.

#### **3. Questionable planters recruit from local churches**

This perhaps is the hardest to swallow and seldom acknowledged. Biblical ecclesiology matters little to a questionable plant. Without consultation or contextual knowledge, some planters covertly and overtly recruit your core team members before they arrive.

Some of this is sincere excitement from the planting team, 'We're coming to town, you should join in with us, it's gonna be awesome!' It's all true. The new plant is awesome, and some people from your local church are quick to jump on board, everything at the new plant is very exciting.

No one sets out with this goal, but it might happen far too often. How many church plants functionally rely on reaching Christians from local churches? It's a question planting organisations and their churches should be answering.

The consequence might be that a whole population demographic shifts from local churches to the now, one big plant. The cost for this won't be realised for a long time, but the likely outcome is the gospel future rests in the one plant and not a diversity of local churches. It sounds like church planting, but in effect, it's the opposite.

#### **4. Questionable church plants enable dysfunction**

For those on your fringe, the church plant is a chance for a 'fresh start' and a chance to recalibrate priorities where they felt they could not do so before. For others the new church is 'cooler' and 'better'. For most exiting saints, consumption is the primary goal.

This is dysfunctional because 'cutting and running' isn't a Biblically mature way to grow in Christ. While theologically unsatisfying you can certainly see where some of these people are coming from. The questionable plant is unlikely to engage on this issue. They welcome new people with open arms and no kingdom related questions.

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 23



# Growing young people beyond youth group

**For youth groups throughout Australia, the school holidays and the Easter period can be challenging times for connecting with young people. Hurstville Presbyterian's youth group, Hurstville Young People Evangelising (HYPE), saw the gap between terms as an opportunity.**

HYPE runs on Friday nights for years 6-12, with a team of four leaders and around 8-15 youth depending on the night.

For the April school holidays, they set up a holiday Bible reading plan, including a WhatsApp group where leaders, youth and parents can all share thoughts on the passages.

One of the leaders at HYPE, Jessie Zhang, shared that they decided to do an Easter Bible reading plan with their youth after successfully trialling the concept over Christmas last year. She says, "We had done a memory verse from Philippians 4, so we thought let's encourage them to read through Philippians. We had found [the Christmas reading plan] was helpful and was a way ...to kind of partner with parents as well."

## **Passion for discipling young people**

Currently, Jessie is a social worker with foster children. She has a passion for young people that goes beyond work and youth ministry as crucially important. She shares, "I was in HYPE when it first started. My leaders were amazing. They are some of the most supportive, most loving people. [They] really invested in me." In addition to her Christian parents, Jessie describes her time as a youth at HYPE as instrumental to her faith and growth as a Christian.

Jessie began leading at HYPE in her second year of university and now has been leading for over five years. Leading at HYPE is all about discipling young people and encouraging them to know Jesus. She says, "You have so much opportunity to speak into their lives, at that time when they really want it. They're really looking for answers, they're really looking for role models and good influences."

## **Bible reading during holiday time**

The HYPE leaders came up with a two-week plan to encourage youth (and their parents) to read the

book of Philippians while away from youth group. Jessie shares, “We broke up the chapters into eight readings, and we have a WhatsApp group with all the kids. One of the leaders [will post part of the passage every few days] saying, ‘Hey, this is what I find encouraging from the passage today. What are your thoughts?’ [To] encourage a bit of discussion.”

Throughout the holidays Jessie and her fellow leaders have been encouraged by how their youth have engaged in the plan. She says, “On the second day we had one youth who asked a question about Paul and Timothy’s relationship with the Philippi church and was interested in knowing more about the context, which was great to see they were keen to dig a bit further.”

As well as a continued opportunity to grow the youth, the Bible reading plan has been a great chance to build relationships with parents. Jessie says, “There are some parents whose kids have been coming for years and they’ll just drop them off...Then there are some parents who are really keen who come to the door every Friday.” Taking teaching and relationship outside of Friday nights has been a unique opportunity to engage with both types of parents and go further in building partnerships with them.

**Prayer for HYPE and growing Christian youth**

As youth group returns on Fridays in Term 2, Jessie and the other HYPE leaders are focused on improving the group so youth are being engaged and grown. As always in ministry, there are challenges to navigate so that the group can



HYPE leader Jessie Zhang



HYPE at their end of Term 1 social

continue to be effective in reaching and discipling young people.

Jessie explains, “At the moment we are adjusting to having a younger age range in our youth group. We’re used to having more year 9 – 12s. [They have] a lot less energy and just love to sit and discuss. Whereas [at the moment] we’ve got more year 6-8s. They want to run around and find it difficult to sit in a Bible study or talk and just listen.” She asks that people pray that the HYPE team can navigate this wisely so that all the youth at HYPE are learning and growing in Christ.

For Jessie, her own experience is a driving force for why she continues to lead at HYPE and minister to young people. She shares, “I wouldn’t have been as grounded in my faith in high school without having my leaders and without having a youth group to come back to every Friday night.”



**Presbyterian Youth**



## Ukraine: Partnership in Action

At the time of writing \$446,000 has been donated for assistance arising from the Ukraine crisis. The appeal has now been closed.

Our Moderator General, the Rev Dr Peter Barnes writes: "This is a most encouraging result indeed. God has moved in the minds and hearts of His people. The God of all grace has inspired acts of grace. With many thanks to everyone for their generosity."

The refrain that we hear from our partners is "The impact of this war and its after-effects will be felt for quite some time. Please help us by sending funds over the medium term so that we can meet emerging needs." Our partners on the ground are best-placed to know what is needed amid a somewhat fluid situation and so we are listening to their advice. This money will take some months to disburse in a sustainable and responsible manner.

We are now distributing the funds through four partners.



### Granville and Ibolya Pillar

Granville and Ibolya live 50km from the Hungarian-Ukrainian border and have been working with local churches. This has involved things such as the purchase of a van to send medical supplies into Ukraine, and aid for children in three orphanages. We have also played a part in the purchase of the ambulance in this picture to care for wounded people in Ukraine. Our partners have expressed their deep gratitude for the Presbyterian Church of Australia's generous support.

### European Christian Mission

APWM has a long-standing partnership with European Christian Mission (ECM), who have people on the ground across Europe who are working directly with Ukrainian refugees. ECM has been transporting and tending to the needs of refugees in various locations.

### SIM's 'For Freedom' Ministry

It's a sad fact of life that when a crisis such as this arises, all sorts of people seek to inflict pain on others by ensnaring them into a life of slavery. SIM is another long-standing APWM partner and its 'For Freedom' ministry, co-led by APWM missionary Karine Woldhuis, works with Anti-Trafficking ministries in Europe which attempt to lead people to safe accommodation and security.

### Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe

Laszlo and Eva Milhalyi from Victoria, serve near Budapest and belong to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Eastern Europe. Through this denomination people are being cared for either in Ukraine through the denomination's Ukrainian congregations or the congregations in other European countries.





## Bible Distribution: How hard can it be?



A few years ago, through APWM, you sent 9,000 Bibles to the Nuer people among the 400,000 South Sudanese refugees in the refugee camps in Gambella, in western Ethiopia. There are 100,000 members of our partner church, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, in these camps.

Thank you to the many people who over the last few years gave additional donations to make it possible for us to send just under 5,000 more Bibles. Such Bibles are not as readily available as our English Bibles and it can take some time to find the right supplier. It turns out that ordering the Bible is the easy part!

APWM missionary, Motor Yat, serves in these refugee camps. Distributing the Bibles presents some challenges that we don't face in Australia.

**First**, permission to distribute the Bibles must be granted from the Ethiopian official who oversees all the camps.

**Second**, the official overseeing each camp must grant permission for the Bibles to be distributed, and that depends on whether there has been recent unrest in that particular camp.

**Third**, a vehicle must be hired to carry the Bibles over unsealed roads over long distances.

**Fourth**, the paperwork must all be in order before the gatekeeper at each camp will permit the vehicle to enter — and such permission sometimes needs to be negotiated at the gate!

In some of the camps, the distribution was a very smooth process. In others, people from one tribal group were not permitted to enter the camps so people from other tribal groups had to be used.

This whole process was carried out in conjunction with the Presbyterian ministers in the camps in partnership with our partner, The Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia. An added complication was the presence of groups of political rebels meaning that sometimes a police escort was needed!

Please join with us in praising God, that in His mercy these Bibles are now in the hands of our brothers and sisters. Please pray that as the Word of God is read, it will make a tremendous impact on both individuals and communities.

### CONTACT

Australian Presbyterian World Mission  
1 Clarence St Burwood NSW 2134

[national@apwm.org.au](mailto:national@apwm.org.au)

Phone: (02) 8073 7490

[www.apwm.org.au](http://www.apwm.org.au)

[facebook.com/AustralianPresbyterianWorldMission/](https://facebook.com/AustralianPresbyterianWorldMission/)



*“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”* **2 TIMOTHY 2:2**

# Ministers Drought and Ministry apprenticeships

BY ELLIOT KU

One of the recurring conversations among churches today is the issue of the ‘ministers drought’.

To be sure, this concern is not unique to Presbyterians. But we feel it with a particular sense of urgency. Consequently and appropriately, agencies within the PCNSW are seeking to address this concern.

However, while these agencies have their role and place, I’d like to humbly suggest that the Biblical response ought to be a firm commitment towards discipling and raising these leaders from within our *local churches*.

In God’s kindness, the rain that will ease this drought is the men and women that God has placed within our care. Yes, having more finances, “importing” talent from outside of our denomination, and rethinking our ordination standards *may* help. But all of this ought to be secondary to the biblical and critical work of raising pastors of our own.

To be sure, agencies are supplementary and helpful. For example, the METRO committee does a fantastic job in coming alongside churches, encouraging leaders, and providing funding to facilitate the training of ministry apprentices.

But METRO as an agency does not train apprentices. Rather, it is the privilege and responsibility of local churches.

Therefore, if we want to address the minister drought, then I’d like to humbly encourage ministers of churches to consider godly people from their congregation whom they can tap on the shoulder to undergo a ministry apprenticeship.

This will take a long time. From my limited experience, I’ve noticed that it takes about three to five years of *discipleship* and *discernment* before



Gospel Lab night at GracePoint Presbyterian (December 2021).



Trainer and apprentices at GracePoint Presbyterian Church, Lidcombe.

someone is ready to have a conversation about an apprenticeship.

There are no shortcuts. But isn’t that such a wonderful thing - to come alongside someone, mentor them in the faith, examine their life and character, recognise their strengths and weaknesses, determine their suitability, and appropriately affirm their calling and encourage them to train for ministry?

The Apostle Paul certainly saw it as both a duty and a delight (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

Investing and entrusting the Gospel to faithful leaders is a long path, and a two-year apprenticeship is only the beginning of a lifetime of training for ministers.

But we need to recognise that God has given the church all she needs to flourish. The pastors and leaders we need for our future are amongst us! My prayer is that every Presbyterian Church in NSW and the ACT can make it a goal *to raise one apprentice who will go on to serve as a minister within the next 10 years*.

If we embrace this biblical calling to raise our own ministers, then we can perhaps by God’s grace see a reversal of this drought and indeed see churches impact our cities with the Gospel under the leadership of wise and godly ministers.

If you would like to have a conversation about how to practically kickstart a ministry apprenticeship program at your church, please speak with either the METRO committee or reach out to me. You can read a bit more about what we do at GracePoint by checking out this page (<http://www.gracepoint.org.au/gospellab>).



# Engaging with changing culture

BY AMY BUTLER

Sometimes, I confess, I am envious of my parents' generation. As Baby Boomers, they lived through a prosperous time in our nation's history and through a time when Christianity, relatively speaking, was the mainstream culture. That is to say, if people weren't necessarily converted or church goers, there was a common acceptance of the Christian worldview.

For decades now there has been a growing shift – at what seems like an exponential speed – where Christian thought now finds itself on the outer. How to engage with this changing culture was the topic of the Gospel, Society and Culture Committee's recent Navigate Forum, titled 'Engaging our culture for Christ'. Social Researcher Geoff Brailey from McCrindle Research and Pastor and author Stephen McAlpine were keynote speakers.

Geoff, drawing from research into the attitudes of Australians towards spirituality and faith, encouraged us that there are still many and varied opportunities for Christians to speak into the cul-

ture and into the lives of their neighbours. He emphasised that people's greatest drawcard to the church is its people, living out lives of genuine faith with integrity.

Stephen talked about his work as a church pastor and as a minister to workers in his city, Perth, with City Bible Forum. He talked about the very real challenges Christians are already facing in the secular world and the important role the church has in equipping their people to live well in 'Babylon', that is, a foreign and even hostile landscape.

Following these keynote addresses were four reflections from people in the PCNSW; Pastor David Maher, Chaplain and Religious Studies teacher Jiye Kim, Freedom for Faith's Rohan McHugh and Town Planner and business director Michelle Chapman. Each reflection offered a unique and personal perspective on cultural engagement as the people of God, individually and corporately.

I came away from the day encouraged and positive about the future. I reflect with thankfulness for the culture that allowed the faith of my parents to flourish, and as I look to disciple my own children in an unfamiliar culture, I do not lose hope. We have challenges to face, no doubt – however, we rest in the grace and sovereignty of God.

It was wonderful to take the time to put deep reflection and thought into these issues. All the talks are available on the GS&C website and would be excellent for sessions and Bible study groups to consider.



Geoff Brailey



Stephen McAlpine



David Maher



Jiye Kim



Rohan McHugh



Michelle Chapman

## Two different approaches to teaching the significance of Easter through SRE

**F**or many kids and youth around NSW, SRE is their only opportunity to hear about Jesus at Easter time. For long-time SRE teachers Janette and James, the joy of sharing Jesus – news far better than chocolate eggs and bunnies – never wanes.

Currently serving at Copmanhurst Public School, Janette has been teaching SRE, initially alongside her husband David, for over 20 years. She says, “I started being David’s assistant and eventually I sort of got comfortable to start myself.”

James has been an SRE teacher for over 27 years and currently teaches at Westlawn Public School, where for the last decade he has been teaching Year 5 and 6 scripture.

Janette teaches at Copmanhurst Public School

There can be challenges in teaching SRE, but there is also a lot of joy. James shares one of the joys is, “Those little ‘aha’ moments when kids ask some very interesting and curly questions, [and they’re] obviously thinking about spiritual things.”

### Sharing the hope of the resurrection

For both Janette and James, Easter is a pivotal time in the calendar of SRE teaching. James says, “I generally find the Easter [teaching] is really engaging with kids. Getting to share what Easter is actually about...and the hope of the resurrection. I’ve always found that a really good lesson to do.”

Janette shares, “The Easter and Christmas stories are really easy stories to do, because culturally there is so much about Christmas and Easter we can connect with, like what does the cross mean on a hot cross bun? [This Easter] the lesson was from John on the empty tomb.”

At Copmanhurst Public School, lessons on Easter are done in the weeks coming up to the Easter weekend and Janette uses props like hot cross buns and hollow Easter eggs to talk to the kids about the cross and the empty tomb.

In Janette’s classes, Easter often encourages kids to speak up even when they’ve previously not been very engaged. She shares, “[There was] a little girl who hadn’t really spoken before and [she shared] she knew a little bit about Easter.” It’s always great when kids feel like they are able to feed back to their teachers on what they already have heard about Jesus.

At Westlawn, they do their Easter lessons after the holidays. James says, “I find the kids are always distracted by Easter. There will be issues of hat parades, Easter eggs and bunnies.” The practice of starting the term after the holidays with a lesson on Easter has been successful for James over many years and

classes. He says, “[That the Easter story is history] is the focus of the lesson. It’s helping the kids understand we’re not dealing with fairytales; we’re actually dealing with eyewitnesses.”

### Using different teaching styles

James and Janette are both experienced SRE teachers and they’re both teaching in similar areas, in schools in and around Grafton. You might imagine, walking into the classes of James and Janette, that they would look the same. However no SRE class is alike, and both James and Janette utilise their unique skills and strengths to teach in different ways.

For James, using technology in the classroom to engage kids is very important. He says, “For many years I’ve walked in with a USB because there are smart boards in every classroom that I go into and having something massively visual in front of them these days is a very, very helpful thing. So I’ve always looked for videos that complement what we’re looking at.” Whether this is an animated video talking through the Bible passage for the lesson or an addition to the Godspace PowerPoint resources he is already using, James loves incorporating digital aspects into his lessons.

Janette has chosen not to use technology in her lessons, as it’s not a strength for her. But instead, she makes sure to allow a certain amount of flexibility for what the class likes. She explains, “One year I had some older kids and they loved acting out plays. There were several lessons that were done by a play. So then when there weren’t lessons that had a play, they asked for it, so I would sometimes convert lessons into plays.”

### Why SRE has been their ministry for decades

With a ministry like SRE, there are always challenges. School leadership can sometimes be unsupportive, or teachers can be given poor class times that make engaging kids difficult. But the joy of sharing Jesus with the students far outweighs any of the challenges. Janette highlights that even the little things can make a class feel so encouraging. She says that recently, “One little girl was so excited to tell me there was a Bible in her house.” This kind of awe and excitement about knowing Jesus sustains teachers like James and Janette for decades of service.

And as James says, “[Doing SRE] is very strategic. I look at it and think, I know that... we’re sowing seeds into their life.”

There are so many schools in need of SRE teachers, and even more kids who need to learn more about Jesus. No matter what kind of skills or style of teaching you bring, SRE needs you! Would you consider volunteering at your local public school? Extensive support and training is provided! Learn more: <https://pynsw.org.au/sre/>

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**5. Questionable planters have strained relations with other local churches**

Local churches may make significant effort to maintain a relationship with the questionable pastor. It's hard though, considering what's been happening. Coffee, dinner, fellowship is all initially received, but wanes quickly. The reality of the schizophrenic relationship is revealed. It's hard to maintain meaningful relationships with the churches who have been hurt.

**6. Questionable planters reveal your own weaknesses**

Most people genuinely warm to the questionable pastor. He's not Satan. To the contrary, he is loving and gifted. The questionable planter, like his church, may do many things significantly better than you and your church. Some people may leave, citing deficiencies in you and your church, which can be very painful. There is, however, a silver lining to this dark cloud. There are things you can improve on and this plan gives you the opportunity to identify what those things are and to change them.

**7. Questionable church plants gut and kill churches**

On paper, it appears the kingdom is growing, that's certainly the report given to the questionable plant congregation, their sponsoring organisation and denomination. The questionable planter will speak at the next conference you go to. Seldom, if ever reported, is the closure of good gospel churches and the gutting of stronger churches which significantly inhibits their Gospel outreach. Finally, who considers the resignation

of discouraged but faithful gospel pastors? Questionable plants strengthen some, but we should pause to notice those it kills.

**Lessons from questionable plants**

1. Christ is the good shepherd – John 10
2. The pastor's identity and his church, is found in Christ, not in 'success' – 1 Corinthians 6:17
3. Christ strength is revealed in weakness – 2 Corinthians 4
4. Learn from questionable pastors – Proverbs 27:17
5. Pruning can be good for your church – John 15:2
6. Have a newfound appreciation and commitment to your local church family – Acts 20:28
7. Live out Christ's grace in your ecclesiology – Matthew 7:12
8. Love planting pastors – Romans 12:18

**A conclusion**

Could some planters be more mindful of what the Bible says and the broader kingdom picture? Yes, they could. Planting should always multiply functional Gospel churches not close them.

Likewise, could local churches do a better job in welcoming planters for the kingdom growth? Absolutely. There's always more room for more gospel ministry.

I'm thankful though, so many churches are planted so well. May they grow big, may they grow fast and may they multiply in Jesus' name.

- Ben Smith is Assistant Pastor at Harbourside Presbyterian Church

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

**The strange providence of God.**

There are actually four examples of faithfulness here in Jeremiah 26 - there is Jeremiah, there are the elders who speak up in verses 17-19, there is Uriah who is put to death in verses 20-23, and there is courageous Ahikam in verse 24. Why is one man put to death and another preserved? The answer is 'I do not know, and I cannot know.' That is in God's hands. He does as He wills. In Acts 12 Peter and James are arrested. James is put to the sword, and Peter is miraculously released. Why? The same answer. God has His purposes. That is something we have to try to

understand, and also understand how much we cannot fully understand.

Here we have a warning about God's judgment on His sinful people, here we have an offer of repentance, and here we have examples of faithfulness, even in difficult and hostile circumstances. What kept these people faithful?

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

They remembered that they were members of an eternal kingdom (Revelation 12:10-11). If we do not do that, we will drift along with the rest of society. The one who will be saved is the one who is faithful, not just occasionally, but to the end.

# Persecuted for the sake of the Word

JEREMIAH 26

I

t is a startling thought that those who wish to be Godly will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). That is laying down a general principle. It is telling us that what happened to Jeremiah is not an isolated case, applicable to him but not to us.

No, no, - the more Christian we are in a godless age, the more likely we are to suffer persecution (John 15:18-20). We may not be hauled before magistrates, but we should not be surprised if we are given a hard time, by workmates, the woman next door, the media, or members of our own family.

## Faithfulness before the crowd.

The year was about 608 BC, after Godly king Josiah had been killed in battle. Jeremiah was now vulnerable - his royal protection was gone. If it was difficult to be faithful to God while Josiah was alive, it was much more difficult now that he was dead. But Jeremiah rose above the temptation to diminish the word or omit any part of it, or tone it down (26:2; see too Acts 20:26-27). What do people naturally want? Julian Huxley wrote a book called Religion Without Revelation. That is what people naturally want - all the comforts with none of the challenges. Jeremiah stood firm on God's Word. He warned the people but also offered them God's grace. Turn to God, and He will spare Jerusalem; keep going the way you are going, and Jerusalem will end out like Shiloh, which was destroyed about 1050 B.C. That is a tough message, but it is a true message (26:1-6).

## Faithfulness before the court.

As so often happens, the greatest opposition to Jeremiah is religious (26:7-11). The prophets and priests did not shake his hand at the end and say, 'Nice sermon. And the music was very contemporary.' Instead, they dragged him out to the gates, and put him on trial for his life. They wanted him dead. It was the prophets and the priests who claimed that God was too loving to punish His people.

That was the charge that Stephen had to face too (Acts 6:13). The charge is disturbing the peace. TS Eliot once said that we cannot bear too much reality. Certainly these prophets and priests could not.



They do not ask whether Jeremiah's words were true or not. What mattered to them was that he was upsetting the people by saying that God would judge them. Let us be clear: there is a judgment. God will gather us all to Himself, and He will judge us - everything we have ever done, everything we have ever said, every motive which ever moved us.

That is not a comfortable thought. There is a broad way to destruction, to hell. That either annoys you greatly or moves you to do something about it.

The message cannot be changed (26:12). The message comes from God. So does the call to repent, despite what anti-conversion laws dictate (26:13). Jeremiah has no certainty as to what would happen to him (26:14-15). We cannot know either, but the first issue is never the possible consequences, but what is the right thing to do.

A prophet who preached a similar message was martyred - Urijah or Uriah in 26:20-23. As it happens, Jeremiah did not suffer this fate, but he could not know that until after the event.

## Know your Bible!

Jeremiah appealed to Micah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem (26:16). The royal officials and the people were rather more reasonable than the priests and the prophets. And some of the elders knew their Scriptures (26:17-19). That slowed them down. They knew what Micah had said, and how Hezekiah had responded (see Micah 3:12; 2 Kings 18:3-6). A few elders with the Scriptures were prepared to face up to the priests and false prophets. Truth is truth, whether it is welcome or unwelcome. It is no argument against the truth to say that we do not like it. Knowing the Bible is a defence against tyranny, injustice, and false teaching.

God rules by His Word. A hundred years before this, Hezekiah had asked whether Micah's message was true, not whether it thrilled his soul. That is the way to tackle the issue, indeed any issue. Not to live by God's Word is to offend God and harm yourself.

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 23