

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA IN NSW/ACT ·  
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# the PRESBYTERIAN pulse

Bumper Christmas Edition



## Messages of Christmas From:

Moderator-General Rev David Burke and  
NSW Moderator Ben Greig

MESSAGES OF CHRISTMAS FROM OUR MISSIONARIES  
IN PAPUA NEW GUINEAS, KENYA AND FRANCE

► PLUS: Bill and Sue Camden's book launch, a year at Queanbeyan Pressie, PIM, APWM, PY, METRO, Jericho Road and more.

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The Pulse is an internal publication of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. We do not accept paid advertising.

The Pulse is a forum for sharing ideas and encouraging outreach to our local communities, our nation, and the world.

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**COVER:** The adage says, 'a picture is worth 1000 words' and these drawings by children who attend some of our PCNSW/ACT preschools sum up Christmas in a child's eyes. Thanks to Jericho Road, for organising for the children to create our cover images for this edition.  
Background image by Freepik

# Editorial

BY KAREN FORMAN

Christmas is coming! New Year is coming! Holidays are coming (for those fortunate enough to be able to get time off work)! Summer is here! Christ is coming!

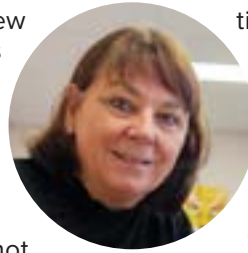
Hmmm, should I have not have started that sentence with, "Christ is coming!"? Is not the imminent arrival of December 25 and the day that Christians celebrate the birth – and unknown return date - of our saviour, the absolute most important thing on our minds at this time of the year?

Was I thinking of Christ when I typed that first statement? Or the happenings around Christmas, because my extended family is getting together for the first time in forever, I get some time off work, I get to buy gifts for my loved ones, we get to decorate the house, my musician daughter has a full schedule of Christmas-themed gigs and the Christmas fruits I love are back in the supermarkets?

Truth is, I may "know" what Christmas is all about. I think about Jesus every day. I play recorded music with great lyrics and I play live music on my ukelele both solo and with our church band, that praises Him. I read the Bible (not often enough). I pray. Yes, Jesus' birthday would have been a subconscious part of my thinking as I typed that first sentence. But I fear that it wasn't the first thing on my mind.

How often do we "forget" that Christ should come first in everything we say and do? How often do we get caught up in the comings and goings and stressors and excitement of daily life, of work and school, sport, hobbies and social connections?

Even working for the Church as Pulse editor and media and communications manager, playing music with our church band on Sundays, running a weekly Chris-



tian music jam, doing Bible studies, praying and doing "good works" still doesn't seem to influence my ability to putting Christ at the forefront of every thought, word and deed. Sometimes I hand

stuff over and take it back. Sometimes I don't hand stuff over at all. I try to do it alone.

How are you going with that?

Christmas, as you will read in the various expositions, messages and stories inside this bumper edition of the Pulse magazine, is a great time to reflect on where we are at with God. Being on holidays would give us even more time to do so!

God sent his Son to us to be born of the virgin Mary for the purpose of then giving up his life for us – to sacrifice Himself so that we could be forgiven for our sins. We collectively celebrate that big event on December 25, but we know that Jesus should be in our thoughts all of the time.

"What would Jesus do?" is a great saying taught to me by a mentor minister years ago. I love it. It works for all occasions, emotions and decisions. As long as I remember to ask it, before having an anxiety attack/making a rash decision/putting it in the too hard basket.

A new year is about to begin. Christ is coming. He came. And He is coming back. Are we ready? And what does that mean? Is it doing all this stuff or is it just making ourselves open to His love and grace so that we can give it to others? Especially at Christmas?

The Pulse editorial team extends its prayers and hopes and thanks to all readers and contributors for Christmas. We will be back with our first Pulse magazine for 2024 in March.

# THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

BY DAVID BURKE

## Mary, the mother of Jesus, has a bad press.

The Mary of the church suffers from so many misconceptions as to look like an unbelievable super-hero of a cartoonist's imagination.

The Mary of the church is treated as co-redeemer, queen of heaven, and above the angels and saints in the honour she deserves. Within these traditions she is believed to have been conceived free of Eve's curse and lacking in original sin. At the other end of her life, she is believed to have experienced an Elijah-like bodily assumption free of death's sting. Her statue is found in church buildings and people pray to her, thinking she can put in a good word with her son Jesus to get their prayers answered.

This Mary has been pushed into saying "look at me, aren't I one lucky girl!". It's no wonder that many Christians turn their backs and are suspicious of any attention being given to Mary.

This Mary is both unbelievable and unrecognisable. The Mary of the Bible is such a different person to the Mary of the church. There's something about her which has irresistible appeal and is helpful in our life of faith.

Matthew, and especially Luke, are our main sources on Mary, with one mention in Acts (1:14) and two in John (2:1-5 and 19:25-27).

We meet Mary as a young woman who is engaged to a Nazareth tradie. Everything went upside down when an angel told her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. As if that was not enough, her child would be God's Son and have a David-like throne with no end (Luke 1:26-33). Gosh – how do you explain that to your mum and girlfriends? Mary did just what we might expect when she asked how that could be (Luke 1:34).

It's clear that Mary had trouble taking this in and understanding what God was doing. And so, we read of her treasuring and pondering things that were said about



Jesus, along with being astonished and puzzled (eg, Luke 2:19,23, 47,50). We also have some 'mother and son' moments when Mary scolded the young Jesus (Luke 2:48) and he was seemingly dismissive towards her (eg, John 2:1-5; Mark 3:31-35). Presumably Mary was also involved in the scene when Jesus' siblings tried to remove their embarrassing brother from public gaze (Mark 3:21).

Many families have that 'special child' that everyone watches to see how they turn out. Jesus certainly fits that category. For any parent, seeing your child die is a worst fear. We can only imagine Mary's feelings at the Cross when Simeon's words came true: '... and a sword will pierce through your own soul also' (Luke 2:35). How bittersweet it must have been when one of his final acts was to ensure that his mum was cared for when he died (John 19:25-27).

Mary was not alone in trying to figure Jesus out, but it all made sense after his death and resurrection. Our last sighting of Mary is when she, with Jesus' brothers, joined the rump of praying disciples in the upper room before Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

In the light of Mary's struggling journey to faith, her song in pregnancy is remarkable and is surely Spirit-given (Luke 1:46-55). At the start of her son's life Mary gives a breathtaking view of his significance. Phrase upon phrase echoes the Old Testament. Mary speaks of how God is mighty, holy, and merciful (Luke 1:49) and was inverting the order of a fallen world (Luke 1:51-53).

Mary puts her son's birth in the widest Biblical setting. God's remembering of his covenant led to the Hebrews being rescued from slavery through his servant Moses (Exodus 1:24-25). In the birth of Jesus, God again remembered his promises and saved his people through his servant (Luke 1:54-55).

We rightly reject the Mary of the church. However, we do well to heed the Mary of the Bible. Let's join her in rejoicing in God who saves and join her in telling others about him.

## Christmas office closures and contacts

The Presbyterian Pulse team would like to take this opportunity to wish our readers a blessed, safe and healthy Christmas.

Our next edition of the magazine will be published in print and online at [www.pcns.org.au](http://www.pcns.org.au) (sign up to be included on our MailChimp mailout list!) in March, 2024. We welcome readers' feedback on The Pulse, so please send your suggestions and comments to Jeof Falls [jfalls@pcns.org.au](mailto:jfalls@pcns.org.au)

Copy deadline for the next edition is Monday, January 29 and all contributions should be emailed to Editor Karen Forman [kforman@pcns.org.au](mailto:kforman@pcns.org.au)

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# Feasting Freely, This Christmas

BY JEOF FALLS

**For many Australians Christmas Day is a time of sharing gifts and delicious food. For those who have been saved through faith by the grace of God, Christmas Day is also a time of prayer and praise in the birth of Jesus Christ.**



Many Christian families will come together to share a specially prepared feast of hot and/or cold food depending on the traditions in their household, which may include turkey, chicken, pork, prawns and other seafood that is lovingly prepared and shared following grace.

During the past few months at my Church at Chatswood, we have been studying Leviticus, the third book of the Bible that sets in minute detail the rules for worshipping God, including in Leviticus 11, which outlines the rules for the food laws that God gave Israel. These include laws for the eating of land animals that have a divided hoof and chew the cud (cows, sheep and goats, which rules out pork) and water creatures that have fins and scales (which rules out prawns, oysters, crab, and lobster).

These food laws separate food that is clean and can be eaten (kosher food) from food that is not clean and which cannot be eaten. In the last section of the chapter (verses 44 and 45) God gives the reason for these laws – God rescued Israel to be his holy people: “I am the Lord, who brought you out

of Egypt to be your God; therefore, be holy, because I am holy.” These laws, in addition to all the laws set out in Leviticus, set God’s people apart for God while separating God’s people from the world. For those serious about keeping kosher, every meal is a reminder that you need to be clean and that you are separate from people who do not keep God’s Law.

But, as all Christians believe, it is not food that makes us unclean before God, it is sin that makes us unclean. As Jesus said to the crowd in Mark 7:15 “Nothing outside a person can defile them.” ... 19 “For [food] doesn’t go in their hearts but into their stomach. Rather it is what comes out of the person that defiles them”.

In saying this, Jesus declared all foods to be clean as true holiness is not about food. It is sin that makes us unclean. True holiness is about abstaining from sin, not food. But, as our pastor, Jeff Read, said during his sermon on this chapter of Leviticus: “The great news is this. Jesus has made us clean before God. Through his sacrifice on the cross and resurrection, Jesus makes us clean and holy before God.” As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6: “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

I pray you enjoy your lovingly prepared and sumptuous Christmas meals, no matter what you will be eating, with Christ at the heart of your celebration.

# Embracing the “silly season”

BY BEN GREIG

**Often people refer to this time of year as the silly season and it’s not hard to see why. It’s busy, frantic and you are never far away from hearing Mariah Carey’s ‘All I want for Christmas’.**

But even if we strip away some of the modern rush and consumerism, the season has always been a bit silly.

Christmas traditions include strange things like the Poop Log in Catalonia – A magical log that poops out sweets as children beat it with a stick (until it ends the game by pooping out a stinky herring).

In Austria and lower parts of Germany the tales of Krampus are used to frighten children, while in Mexico a beautiful radish carving will be the envy of your neighbours.

Lest we start to get a little smug here, we should not forget that during the hottest part of the year Aussies are attempting to convince themselves they are deep in the winter solstice with pine trees, reindeer and fake snow.

But the silliness goes far deeper and further back than any of this, surely Christians are the silliest of all.

We celebrate God Himself becoming a weak human and not even a great human by our standards, a poor family in a backwater part of the Roman empire, and let’s not kid ourselves about our sanitised version of the nativity.

Anyone that’s been around sheep or cattle knows the idea of any kind of serenity in the manger is close to delusional.

And yet we celebrate, because the silliness of Christmas is part of the good news; God came to us in his weakness and foolishness not just to shame our strength and wisdom but to show us how great our God really is.

The God who is strong enough to save us in his weakness, the God who is wise enough in his foolishness, the God who is enough.

So, friends, embrace the silliness of the season and boast in our God who saves in the silliest of ways.



**Over the past few years, Allowah has done it really tough financially. And the thing we have learned is that we can only provide the essential care and support to our children and their families with the generous support of donors. There is no block government funding, what we provide is too expensive for many families to afford and yet, without Allowah many would be without support.**

We are so thankful for the hundreds of people who give so faithfully to Allowah. We know there are lots of great causes out there and we want to thank you for supporting Allowah. We want you to know that without you we could not go on. And that the past 18 months are proof that with you, we can go on!

Whether it is the young people who because of their needs their parents cannot find respite anywhere else, or the children who need one-to-one care 24 hours a day with medical support, each one has their own story. It’s such a privilege for Allowah to be a part of their life and

walk beside their families. We hope you know that as a supporter of Allowah you walk beside them too.

This year we aimed to raise \$1.2 million. We are half-way there which is amazing. Coming into the end of the year we would like to raise the remaining \$600,000. We know that’s a lot to ask and we do so humbly.

We’d also like to ask if you know of any businesses who would like to be a Corporate Supporter of Allowah, that you can ask them if they would like to join you walking beside these kids and their families. We’d love to get to know them and show them the real impact they can have.

Can you help us, the kids and their families end the year with confidence? We can only do it with you and people like you so please share your love of Allowah with others.

Get in touch: 8877 3400 | supportus@allowah.org.au  
Donate today: allowah.org.au/give23

# How our missionaries celebrate Christmas

**Australians celebrate Christmas in many ways. Sometimes traditionally with hot meals and plum pudding; sometimes with cold fresh seafood on the beach. But what do our missionaries, serving overseas get up to? With assistance from APWM (NSW), The Pulse checked in with missionary families in Papua New Guinea and Samburu.**

## **THE AXON FAMILY IN PNG**

We are the Axon family Richie, Bernadette, Emily, Timothy and Stephen.

We have been working in Papua New Guinea for over 13 years with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF).

Our current home is in Telefomin PNG.

When on Home Assignment we spend a lot of time at Narrabri in NSW.

We have spent a lot of Christmases in Papua New Guinea and it is always fun to meet together with the other MAF families and celebrate in the style of our own country and to share in some of the different traditions from other countries.

There are traditions for Christmas where we are locally: There is a church service on Sunday morning.

The time over the Christmas period is about spending time with family and eating together. What the people love about Christmas is that family members who live or work away come home for the public holidays to be with family.



The PNG people do not typically give presents as they don't have much money. Overall Christmas is not a huge occasion for the local people as more emphasis is put on Easter when outreach activities are planned.

This time of the year is challenging. It is hard to be away from our family at Christmas. Also, the post is very slow to arrive in PNG so often Christmas presents for our family can be a challenge, particularly for us living in a remote village. However, this year we will be spending Christmas in Australia.

Our plans for 2024: We are moving back to Australia in December 2023 for our children's schooling needs. In 2024, we will move to Narrabri, NSW where Bernie's family is, and the Christian School that the kids have attended on Home Assignments in the past. Emily will go into year nine, Timothy into year seven and Stephen into year four.

Thank you for all who have supported us for many years.

## **CHRISTMAS IN NORTHERN KENYA WITH MICK ALLEY**

The ministry of Mission Samburu Australia Limited and Mick Alley.

Mick writes, "We catered for 1900 for our Christmas service in 2022. We were a few hundred short from the previous year as Christmas Day was on Sunday and some people chose to spend Christmas with their families.

It was good that there was enough food to go around, enough bus trips to pick up all who wanted to attend. Each of the villages donated a goat and we provided the rice and the beans.

Set up started the day before by volunteers with hundreds of white plastic chairs in rows before the recently completed stage.

There were barricades to manage the large crowd. The cooks' stations were set up and guards posted overnight.

The drivers of two buses started their pickups at 5.30 am with four trips each to cover 14 villages. They arrived back at 7pm from the drop offs.

Thankfully there was time to run the full program. Jesus' life and the gospel was the central message of the day.

The choirs told the Bible story in new songs that

were crafted in the Samburu language especially for the day.

A Samburu trained young man gave the central message. Old men from the Bible study group were introduced and one gave his testimony. A lady now literate after literacy classes read the Bible passage.

There was much singing and dancing, and the participants looked splendid in their bright clothes and head adornments. The women wore their colourful, beaded changas.

The event was successful because of God's enabling and provision. Thank you, mission partners, for funding this event. Without your support this program would not have been possible.



Christmas day service women 2019 Samburu

Of course, this event will be repeated this Christmas. Probably different people participating but the excitement is high amongst the Samburu people. After working full time with the Samburu people since 2014 this event continues to be one of many highlights of the ministry.

Pray that Christ is exalted, and the believers encouraged and the many who have not yet come to Christ, will understand He is the way the truth and the life.

You can learn more of this ministry at: [missionsamburu.org](http://missionsamburu.org)

Mission Samburu Australia LTD Christmas gift catalogue. <https://missionsamburuorg.raisely.com>



Christmas day service Samburu 2022

## Meanwhile, in France . . .

BY CATHERINE PUFFETT

Slip on a scarf, gloves, coat, boots and the family are ready to head outside for the Christmas markets.

My family (me, Catherine, with Colin and our kids, Julien and Simone), have a little tradition of going to our local Christmas market every year.

We always do the carousel, even if we and the kids are big for it now, and I always get a warm vin chaud (mulled wine) to stop my fingers getting too cold.

We have been in France for six years, and while the Christmas season is experienced differently, it remains a great time for discussion of the reason for the season.

CMS and APWM sent us to France for that exact reason – to proclaim the good news of our Saviour Jesus in a place where few understand the amazing reason we have to celebrate at Christmas.

We don't get a white Christmas in our coastal city, but it is cold enough that we spend a lot less time outdoors.

This year, we are hosting some cosy Christmas craft project sessions with friends, to have hand-made gifts to give to neighbours and colleagues.

We will discuss the gift that we have in the arrival of Jesus as well. We will hopefully join with the local Catholic church to perform the Christmas story as the Bible tells it for their special Christmas markets.

Our final Christmas tradition is hosting a Christmas lunch. Lots of our church members and friends are away from family at the moment. This shared time is a great opportunity to be generous and hospitable.



## REFLECTION

# The hands of Jesus ...

BY ANDRÉW CAMPBELL



I

t is a timeless scene. An exhausted Mary handing Joseph their son. And Joseph smiling in love and wonder, gently offering a finger. And the perfectly formed, tiny fingers of Jesus grasping Joseph's calloused finger in response.

Scientists call it the Simian Reflex, an ape-like behaviour. How cold is that!

For Christians, it points us to the meaning of Christmas, the incarnation. God becoming a human being in Jesus, and in love grasping humanity.

For those tiny hands of Jesus were the hands that, as Graham Kendrick sings, flung stars into space. By Jesus all things were created (Colossians 1:16).

Those hands are the hands that generously provide for us. God opens His hands, David says (Psalm 145:16) and satisfies the desires of every living thing.

Those tiny hands would become the chubby hands of a toddler, getting into everything. The playing hands of a child. The learning, growing hands of a teenager. They would become the skilled, splinter scarred hands of a working man, 'the carpenter' (Mark 6:3)

Those hands would reach out and touch an outcast leper (Mark 1:41). They would make a mud poultice and heal a blind man (John 9:6). Those hands were the hands that touched a coffin (Luke 7:14) and the widow's son sat up.

And those hands would one day be nailed to a Roman cross. Kendrick's song again: "Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered ...."



But those hands of Jesus, still with the scars but larger than life, would one day be shown to a doubting Thomas (John 20:27)

And we have a wonderful description of the hands of Jesus in the last pages of the Bible; a picture of heaven:

Revelation 21:4, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain ..."

Max Lucado imagines Mary praying that first Christmas night looking at the tiny hands of Jesus:

'Rest well, tiny hands. For though you belong to a king, you will touch no satin, own no gold. You will grasp no pen, guide no brush. No, your tiny hands are reserved for works more precious: to touch a leper's open wound, to wipe a widow's weary tear, (to command, 'storm, be still!'). Your hands, so tiny, so tender, so white – clutched tonight in an infant's fist. They aren't destined to hold a sceptre nor wave from a palace balcony. They are reserved instead for a Roman spike that will staple them to a Roman cross.'

Have you noticed that the traditional nativity scenes of Jesus depart from the Biblical story. For Jesus is often not wrapped in swaddling clothes but, instead, with poetic licence, He has His hands spread out, open.

It reminds us that Jesus came to die. For those hands of Jesus were crucified for sinners, wretches, like me, like you. And the hands of Jesus invite you, welcome you. They invite you to embrace Him this Christmas. Our Lord Jesus, who first grasped *you*.



# Prayer, early morning calls and travel on the new PIM Superintendent's agenda

BY KAREN FORMAN

**Each morning, wherever he is in Australia, Stuart Bonnington gets out of bed, prays, breakfasts, then starts about his regular working day routine of making early morning phone calls...lots and lots of early morning phone calls**

The newly appointed full-time Superintendent of PIM (Presbyterian Inland Mission) relies a lot on the phone to engage with the workers all around the country, to plan, to field enquiries, "and all the administration".

Stuart will spend much time away from his home in Albany, Western Australia, visiting congregations and seeking to encourage PIM workers, striving for intentionality in evangelism and discipleship, extending Christian pastoral care and partnering with local churches.

"PIM is an Australia-wide ministry," he says from his home in beautiful Albany. "We desire to build relationships with churches, for me, that's initially in and through prayer, for from that, everything will grow. We have been very heartened by the interest of many".

"While we have New Dunesk, our mission centre in Ardlethan, NSW, as the place we are trying to inspire and send out God's people, PIM has ministry teams across Australia, in the field in Western Australia, NSW, Victoria and Queensland. They are the PIM. I am trying to help, encourage and support them as much as possible. So, I will always be on the move or the phone – and I love it!"

Stuart officially starts as Superintendent of PIM on January 1 but is currently serving as a full-time volunteer until then.

It's not his first time with PIM – he was involved with the organisation from 1993 to 2015, so he is familiar with the Presbyterian Church of Australia's inland mission ministry – and has a heart for mission generally.

PIM has been taking the good news of Jesus to the furthest regions of Australia since its foundation in 1912 by the Rev John Flynn. Its vision is to see people living in the remote and sparsely populated areas of Australia become mature and faithful followers of Jesus.

## **PIM's work includes:**

- **New Dunesk:** Just 2km south of the Riverina town of Ardlethan, on the eastern side of the Newell Highway, sits the home of PIM, known fondly as New Dunesk: a place to Inspire, Equip and Send people out for Gospel work in remote and inland Australia. It's a place where Jillaroos and Jackaroos can network, Nomads are trained and resourced, and Gap Year students gain a heart for the bush. It's a place that sees churches bush camping together and travellers being drawn in for rest.

- **PIM Nomads' Network** which encourages and equips participants to use their nomad travels for God's glory through developing the skills and confidence to effectively share the gospel with others; providing opportunities to serve practically in remote and rural churches and communities; and inspiring participants with the work of the gospel, so that everyone can return home with renewed vigour to serve in their local churches.

- **The PIM Nomads' Network provides members with** an exciting four-day practical ministry training and orientation event at New Dunesk in March each year, an invitation to help run an outreach event at Beltana SA for the ANZAC day weekend, an open invitation to camp at New Dunesk, informal 'reconnect' week of camping at New Dunesk with other Nomads from the network, held in October each year and an opportunity to be part of a brand new network of willing and available volunteers to help serve remote and rural churches and communities in practical ways.

Nomads need their own caravan, camper trailer or tent. New Dunesk has toilets, showers, a conference centre and a camp kitchen. The cost to be part of the program for the year is \$500 per couple or \$350 per individual.

- **The New Dunesk Gap Year** is an exciting opportunity for young Christians to grow in their faith and build practical farm and ministry skills, allowing them to share in PIM's vision to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in remote and sparsely populated areas of Australia. They
  - Develop a whole range of useful farm skills, including fencing, driving and maintaining a range of vehicles, firearm handling, and managing livestock. They might even pick up a truck licence, first aid qualifications and take a course in chainsaw operation.
  - Grow as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and deepen their theological understanding through structured study as part of the Timothy Partnership course.
  - Help out with different events at New Dunesk during the year, where they will develop their relational and leadership skills as they work alongside the New Dunesk manager to help events run smoothly.
  - Become actively involved in the life of the local Presbyterian Church, and develop skills in leading Bible studies, worship service leading, and community evangelism. They might even help with SRE in the local school, or learn to preach a basic sermon.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

# The Year of the Boy

**To celebrate its 130th anniversary in 2023, this year has been dubbed the 'Year of the Boy' at The Scots College. As we are an all-boys' school this may seem obvious, and hardly a ground-breaking revelation.**

In Chapel, we have been focused on what it means to be a man.

As the boys grow into young men it is important to help them to see a healthy masculinity which is a biblical masculinity. We have looked at Jesus the 'real' man; what it means to serve, love, protect, defend those who need it. We have been praying that our young men would grow into mature men who would love Jesus.

The transition through boyhood is one that involves all sorts of supports and encouragements along the way, and at Scots we shape our educational journey from three-years old, right through to Year 12 boys along an age and developmentally appropriate pathway called Brave Hearts, Bold Minds (Curiosity, Exploration, Wonder, Mastery, Belonging, Adventure, Courage and Conviction).

As boys grow, they are able to take on more and more responsibility, and this can also be seen across the Christian ministry of the school.

Our student Christian leaders have had opportunities to grow in their maturity and skills through preaching in Chapel, devotions at Assembly, and assisting with Bible studies for younger boys.

A dedicated focus on 'the boy' has led to great conversations as we walk around the school and conduct our sporting, academic and co-curricular duties.

In the Academic subject, Christian Studies, the Senior boys (in Years 10-12) have been looking at the impact of Christianity on our society over time and have been genuinely surprised that so many of our 'moral laws' have come from Christian commandments and principles.

Most recently, we have picked up the theme of 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. 14 Do everything in love." (New International Version) or, as the English Standard Version says, "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."

As men, it is important for us to be on guard, ready at attention, looking for the things which will draw us away from being men of God. It takes courage and strength to live as men in a world where our identities are frequently challenged.

"Act like men" is a great call which is then explained in verse 14, "Let all that you do be done in love."

Defining 2023 as the 'Year of the boy' was never about giving easy answers or taking the easy option. All year we have been challenging the boys to do what is best, not what is easiest.



The 'Year of the Boy' has encouraged conversations with boys about what it means to live biblical masculinity in contemporary Australia.

# PWA's Federal conference "best yet"

BY GWEN COWELL—FEDERAL PWA PRESIDENT

**PIM Superintendent Stuart Bonnington reckons the 2023 Federal PWA conference was the among the best he had attended.**

Yes, it was a special day.

The Federal PWA President, Heather Burton, presented conference attendees with a day of amazing visitors, who inspired us so much.

It began with a welcome to all, a hymn and devotion from Heather Burton followed by the hymn Will your Anchor Hold, reminding us to stand firm in Christ.

The installation and dedication of the new Federal PWA executive by the Moderator General Rev Dr Peter Barnes was followed with thanks from the incoming Federal President, Gwen Cowell to Mr Barnes and his wife who had been our honorary PWA Patron for 2019-2023.

Gwen Cowell shared her theme for her term of office, "Sharing together in God's Love" Colossians 3:15-17, expressing her desire to be as one body with her team to bring Christ's love to others and seek to unfold the needs of our PWA in Australia, ending with verses from 1 John 4:16-17.

Guest speaker Esther Sylvester shared excellent insights into Romans 8, helping us to look further into our Bibles and see the strengths God has for us to see and rely on.

After the hymn "Take Time to be Holy", Heather welcomed the incoming Moderator General Rev David Burke and Mrs Glenda Burke, who will be our honorary patron for 2023-2026.

Glenda shared with us a 1927 PWA Cookbook and a 1989 Condensed version, to remind us that this world is changing and we need to be aware of God's challenges and purpose for our lives and our PWA, to go forth and trust and know God doesn't change but stands firm forever Ps 33, to seek God's guidance in how to change our perspective and go forth.

The afternoon began with prayer, hymns and continued then to be filled with some amazing messages and stories of God at work.

Kevin Murray from APWM introduced Rev Solomon Vanaroro, from Vanuatu, who enlightened us to the work

and technology ongoing at the Talua Bible College and about the Women's Missionary Union of Vanuatu.

We also heard from Rev Abhishek Barla, Principal of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Dehradun, India, who asked for prayers and support for the churches in India.

Rev David Bayne and wife Linda, from Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, shared how their churches were reaching out in their communities and were planting churches in New Zealand's North Island plus some amazing outreach by a group called CAP (Christians against Poverty).

We then heard from the PIM team, Superintendent Stuart Bonnington and Colin and Alison Morrow from the Mungo Patrol NSW, who shared their thanks for the financial and prayer support of PWA and others.

They presented on PIM's work in the outback and at New Dunesk, sharing also the stories of their support, care and outreach to those struggling and lonely on their outback patrols, plus the highs and lows, but more than anything God's hand and blessings on all.

A vote of thanks to the outgoing federal executive and all who contributed to the 2023 conference was given by Sylvia Johnson followed by prayer and the Benediction.

Thank you, President Heather Burton and the Executive team from Queensland and Western Australia, who made this day so special.

Heather continued her encouragement of getting to know our "REAL PWA" through her report to ministers at the Presbyterian General Assembly of Australia, asking them if they really knew what PWA women are about. Her report gave them food for thought and hopefully all ministers will want a PWA group in their church, to encourage and support the women, in their church and their communities and further afield.

Moderator Rev David Burke thanked her and welcomed the new executive, which was followed by a special prayer for the PWA by Rev Chris Siriweena.

Pray more Ministers will now be aware of our Presbyterian Women's Association of Australia and want to learn more about us, as we work in their State, and want to help us form branches in their churches.



All who attended the Federal Conference



The Federal Executive past /present with Rev. Peter Barnes

## A whole lot of reasons to give thanks



**One of the most wonderful things about being part of the Jericho Road team is being able to have a broad picture of how justice and mercy is being enacted in our denomination in big and small ways.**

Our team has had a busy year – ensuring our day-to-day ministry programs are serving people well, making connections with churches and individuals, and finding ways to equip our denomination to respond to Jesus’ call to love our neighbours.

We have seen the faithfulness of God’s people in financial support for our ministries over the year – towards Allowah and the crucial work we do for families; for our Chaplaincy team as they continue to serve in hard-to-reach places; and for the ongoing, behind-the-scenes work of Jericho Road team.

What a joy it has been to visit churches in the north, west and south of our state – to train congregations, share about our work and be encouraged by the wonderful ministries that are demonstrating God’s character to people in need.

We’ve loved partnering with the young people of PLC and Scots College in their volunteering at Allowah and practical contributions to our food and gift drives. And as always, we finished the year with Packed with Love – thank you so much everyone for getting involved!

We look forward to 2024 and what the Lord will bring as we partner together to seek justice, show mercy and make Jesus known.

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## Fostering belonging for young people with disability in youth ministries

BY ALLY MANN (WITH REV. JASON FORBES)

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**There’s no denying that most of our churches desire inclusion for all.**

However, despite all good intentions, many struggle to meaningfully include those with disability beyond surface-level participation.

For young people with a disability, adolescence can be a period where difference to peers becomes more noticeable and, therefore, inclusion can become more difficult.

Modifications made for kids’ programs may be harder to implement in youth ministry, as the latter often involves more social and less tactile activities in a larger group of people.

Within this context, ‘inclusion for all’ may seem idealistic, especially considering the diversity of impairments, needs, and personalities which exist in the church. As true as this may be, inclusion of people with disabilities is too important to throw into the ‘too hard’ basket.

Scripture affirms meaningful inclusion of all parts of the church, the ‘body of Christ’, as not just ideal but *essential*; “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’...now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:21, 27).

The church *needs* people with disability; we have much to gain through the contribution, leadership and gifts of people with disability.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 13**

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Indeed, a functioning body of Christ does not merely *include* people with a disability, it is a place where people with disability belong.

So, how can leaders in youth ministries foster belonging for all, without losing the essence of what makes youth group, ‘youth group’?

Through conversations with people with disability (specifically those with cognitive or sensory impairments), their families and youth ministers, it seems leaders may not be aware that a young person has a disability, especially if they come from a family not known to the church (indeed, the young person may not have a diagnosis yet).

There may, however, be indicators which alert leaders to the young person’s need for extra support, such as a social incident or experiences of sensory-overwhelm.

This is an opportunity to engage with parents/caregivers, in which leaders can affirm that it’s great to have the young person attend, inform them about the incident and ask for their feedback on how to best support their child.

Furthermore, planning with parents/caregivers may reduce unintended barriers to accessibility and provide reassurance for the young person eg having a visual timetable of the night, having warnings about routine changes, or having a back-up plan if feeling distressed. It might be that the YPWD needs a “go-to” leader or person to feel safe.

### Three creative modifications which emerge from this dialogue:

*A ‘one at a time’ approach helps us avoid a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, generating greater creativity in designing supports.*

Below are some ideas for belonging which have emerged from conversations like those mentioned above. These are listed, not as a checklist, but in the hope that they spark creative thinking for your own context:

- **Run a variety of games.** It’s okay to have some games which reward the most athletic or intellectual, but don’t do this every week; have some games which depend on chance. Similarly, remember that running accessible games is a **whole youth team responsibility**, even if the YPWD has a go-to leader.
- A **Quiet Zone** is a space for those who experience sensory overload. It is a decluttered, quiet space which might include sensory toys. As long as you can ensure appropriate supervision of this space, it may be beneficial during the loudest parts of the night (eg games and singing). Consider linking a livestream to room or using other technologies such as FaceTime or Instagram Live during the



session to increase participation (being mindful of Safe Ministry Practices).

- **Have special nights** with YPWD in mind. A young person with auditory sensitivities may enjoy a Silent Disco one week. A young person on the autism spectrum may have a niche interest, such as the Roman Empire, and may enjoy a themed dress-up night. **Themed dress-up nights** can foster inclusion as YPWD can be and feel involved, even if they can’t fully participate in the games.
- **Ask YPWD how they would like to serve.** Notice the YPWD strengths and collaborate with them and their caregivers on how you might facilitate or create opportunities for serving.

Below are some real-life examples of ways YPWD are serving (noting that some are specific to higher-functioning YPWD):

- A person with Down Syndrome serves by playing keyboard. She is supported to play a song alongside another keyboard player.
- A person on the autism spectrum serves on the sound desk.
- A person with nonverbal communications serves on the welcoming team alongside his Mum.
- A person with Down Syndrome serves by reading the Bible up-front.
- A person with nonverbal communications serves by handing out food post-service.

The body is made up of many parts, and each is indispensable. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by difference or applying a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, youth ministries have much to gain through ongoing conversation with YPWD and their families, and approaching supports *one at a time*.

If you would like to continue this conversation around disability and belonging within your church, please contact Jericho Road’s Disability Advocate, Jason Forbes. [jforbes.disabilityadvocate.pss@gmail.com](mailto:jforbes.disabilityadvocate.pss@gmail.com)

**FROM OUR CHURCHES**

# A Year at Queanbeyan Presbyterian Church,

BY ROBERT MCMULLAN

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**It's hard to believe that just over a year ago, I was commissioned as a Home Missionary here at Queanbeyan Presbyterian Church.**

Even harder to believe is that it took two years and nine months to get here!

However, we know the Lord's timing is perfect and He has certainly shown us that time and time again.

Looking back, we can see how that time back in Northern Ireland was lovely for us as we became a family of three with the arrival of Benjamin in July 2020.

It was such a blessing to be near family and friends at such a precious time, as well as for the extra support that you are so glad of when your first baby arrives.

It was also God's timing for the church here in Queanbeyan as, if we had been here during the COVID lockdowns, it could have had severe financial consequences for the congregation who couldn't meet together in person.

But God's perfect timing allowed the Church not only to prepare financially for our arrival but also to make pivotal infrastructural changes.

They were able to swap out the old church pews, re-wire the entire building, and install both ceiling fans and a projector. This projector, in particular, has proven invaluable in enhancing our Sunday gatherings.

Even though we always felt our call was to Queanbeyan Presbyterian Church during our time in Northern Ireland, it was still incredibly difficult to leave our families again, probably even more so because of the relationship they had built with Benjamin.

When we arrived in Queanbeyan though, we could not have received a better or warmer welcome.

We did feel like it was a home from home in many ways, and God's assurance and peace sustained us in those early days, just as it does now.

We had great help from church members in unpacking our belongings which had been stored here while we



were in Northern Ireland, as well as providing us with many very tasty meals as we recovered from jetlag. We felt very blessed by the Lord through the people of this congregation, and still do.

The year soon saw many ministry opportunities arise, both within the church and in the community.

Key community opportunities were through the Queanbeyan Show in November 2022 where we had a stand where people were given Christian literature and information about the church services, and the kids were able to make their very own badges!

This was a great opportunity for the church to be visibly present in its community in a loving way, while also giving some members of the congregation the chance to step out of their comfort zone and chat with those they met about Jesus and the church.

It was really special to see the two-fold impact of this particular ministry opportunity. We're signed up for the Show in November 2023 and can't wait to see what God has in store there!

Christmas was another amazing time for ministry as we held the church's' first Christmas Tree Festival over three nights in the hall, concluding with a Carol Service in the church. Businesses and groups from the





town came together to decorate the trees according to whichever Bible verse they had been given, and the result was between 30-40 Christmas trees on display telling the Gospel story!

We had trees made of tyres, broken baubles and an upside-down Christmas tree, with a special one being decorated by the kids who attended the festival at our craft table.

We also had a tree at the end which people could attach notes to, describing the impact that reading the Christmas story through the individual trees had on them. It was very special being able to read some of these prayers, encouragements and thoughts at the end of the event.

The carol service was very well attended by the community and congregation alike, and using different multi-media resources really helped speak to the range of ages and backgrounds represented that evening.

Being our first Christmas in Australia, this experience certainly made it one we won't forget!

Another very special time in the church is Easter and we were excited to be able to minister to the local community again during the celebrations.

We had a weekend of events including celebrating the Passover together on Maundy Thursday and having a dawn service by the Queanbeyan River on Easter Sunday morning.

On Saturday, we had an Easter egg hunt and egg decorating time which some families from the community attended and discovered a tradition from our childhood - rolling decorated hard-boiled eggs which reminds us of the stone being rolled away from Jesus' tomb at His Resurrection.

The last egg to crack won a prize... MORE chocolate!

Our first Alpha course has also been going well with

a lot of new people attending and great conversations had as some are exploring faith, while others are sharpening their evangelistic skills.

It has also been deeply encouraging to see organisations such as Bible Study, Men's Monday Night Group, Men's Breakfast and the Craft and Chat group growing, with some members keen to be more involved.

We are also celebrating the attendance of some much prayed-for kids which has allowed us to start a Kids' Church. This is naturally very exciting and we are praying that God will continue to grow and preserve this vital ministry.

After much praying, we recently put together our vision statement as a Church. Our hearts are to "reflect Christ, refresh believers and reach friends" It is our prayer that everything that is said and done here at Queanbeyan Presbyterian Church would be to the glory of God and the building up of His Kingdom.

As we reflect on our journey thus far and anticipate the steps we are yet to take, we're reminded of a profound scripture that says, "Do not despise the day of small beginnings" (Zechariah 4:10). It's easy to become impatient or discouraged when we're yearning for expansive growth or swift progress or in our case waiting for a visa to come through but God's timing is perfect.

Our humble beginnings, small seeds sown, are all part of His grander plan. They grow, flourish, and ultimately bear fruit in His perfect timing.

So, to everyone reading this article, take heart. Celebrate every step, every story, every soul. Our faith assures us that even if the start seems small, the Lord's work will culminate in magnificent ways we can scarcely imagine.

Let's embrace and cherish these days, for they are the foundation of the great things God is building within our broader church community.



# A God moment at Nimmitabel

BY DAVID AND ISABEL SCHULZ

Recently on our holidays to NSW whilst visiting our son on the Monaro, or Snowy Mountain Plains, we happened to call in at Nimmitabel for morning tea. Nimmitabel is an old historic township of just 320 people and about 52 kilometres from Bombala.

Whilst enjoying a cuppa in one of the old historic buildings, we couldn't help but overhear two women on the table next to us discussing the pros and cons of Christianity. By the way they spoke it was clear they were not Christians themselves.

I took the opportunity to lean over and say, "I can't help overhearing your conversation about Christianity. We're Christians, and it's encouraging to hear people discussing matters of faith and religion."

We ended up joining together in a very pleasant and I hope fruitful conversation. The two ladies had just moved into town. After they left, the owner of the café came over to us and said, "I couldn't help overhearing your conversation with those two ladies." He then said, "I'm an Anglican and help run the local youth group here."

What followed next was a great encouragement to us.

As we chatted, he told us about a young couple who had come up from Gippsland to do ministry at Bombala.

He told us that they had visited Nimmitabel, and while in the town the young man had helped him cut down a large tree.

His practical help apparently made quite an impression. The owner of the café seemed to be amazed that a young couple were coming up onto the Monaro to do ministry in this day and age.

We said to him, "I think we know who you are talking about – are their names Noah and Nerroli Vasiliades?" He responded with surprise, "Yes, that's them!"

Noah and Nerroli, don't think you're not making an impression for the Gospel! People are taking note. There are fields white and ready for harvest up there, including the café owner, and the two ladies who have just moved into town!

*Noah and Nerroli Vasiliades began their work on the Snowy Mountains Patrol for the Presbyterian Inland Mission in January 2023. Since then, they have been working hard to engage in evangelism and discipling work in their home town of Bombala and the surrounding area, running outreach events and building relationships through one-on-one bible reading. If you would like to stay updated on the work of the Vasiliades, visit [pim.org.au/give/snowymountains](http://pim.org.au/give/snowymountains) and sign up to their mailing list.*



Noah and Nerroli Vasiliades



# Church camp in the outback



## BY REV DAVID HAWKEN—GRIFFITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

More than 60 people attended the Griffith and Leeton Presbyterian churches camp at New Dunesk, PIM's self-catering campsite near Wagga Wagga, in September.

The group shared dinner together on Friday as other campers gradually arrived and were warmly greeted by the onsite manager who gave us a brief orientation.

Then, over a campfire and some toasted marshmallows, we spent time together enjoying the peaceful surroundings and one another's company. We got ready for bed and made use of the warm showers on an otherwise cold night!

Over the next two days we focused on the theme of church unity as we heard God's word taught and attended Bible studies.

We were challenged to keep Jesus as the source of our unity since his death and resurrection is the sole reason why we are Christians!

Our kids attended their own program too, which included making Father's Day craft for the dads.

During our free time some of us explored the area on a bushwalk while others sat back at camp and read a book or talked amongst themselves. There was something for all interests at New Dunesk.

We didn't just hear about church unity, we also got to put it into practice as we all served each other through cooking, cleaning and competing in family fun games. We had a great weekend together and have already booked our camp for next year.

If your church is considering a camp or weekend away, I recommend you consider New Dunesk.

*Is your church, youth group or conference looking for a location to hold your 2024 camp? The Presbyterian Inland Mission's New Dunesk may be the perfect fit! Located one hour north of Wagga Wagga in NSW, New Dunesk hosts a self-catering campsite set in a beautiful outback landscape, complete with powered camp kitchen, amenity blocks and air-conditioned conference centre. For more information about booking your camp at New Dunesk, email [newdunesk@pim.org.au](mailto:newdunesk@pim.org.au), call 0493 294 798 or visit [pim.org.au/new-dunesk](http://pim.org.au/new-dunesk)*



# Yay, it's Scripture time: with Roslyn Deal

**Roslyn Deal is the SRE Director at PYNWSW and also works two days per week at Ashfield Presbyterian Church as the pastoral assistant for women.**



Ros was first introduced to PYNWSW through their yearly camps and found that her kids were really encouraged by the camps. "... particularly because we were in a country town and they barely met any other Christians, so for them, it was a time of real encouragement where they would meet other church kids", she shared.

From that initial introduction to PYNWSW, Ros ended up working with PYNWSW in the role of SRE Director. However, that wasn't Ros' first experience of SRE.

### The beginnings of Ros' love and advocacy for SRE

Growing up in a Christian family, Roslyn has always understood the truth of the Gospel and has always believed that Jesus died for her. As a parent herself, Roslyn knows the benefit of teaching kids the Gospel and helping them to understand the message of the Bible from a young age.

Back when Ros' husband was in theological college, they went on a college rural trip together and Ros was amazed to see how responsive the students were to the SRE classes that the group ran.

"I ended up in the role as SRE Director because I had been advocating for SRE separately as an SRE teacher at my children's primary school. I was also the SRE representative for parents on the P&C, on the consultative department of the education consultative committee," she shared.

Ros also has a teaching degree and still teaches casually to keep up with department teaching practices. She shares that one of the things she enjoys most about teaching and being involved in SRE is seeing the excitement and joy that comes from the students' faces.

"There is nothing like the joy on students' faces when they see you standing at the door and say, 'Yay, it's scripture time'," she says. "What I love is the lightbulb moment that goes on when the students make connections between what they hear and their lives."

The SRE program itself is made accessible to many different

teaching styles as the curriculum is adaptable to meet the needs of the teacher.

"There's a curriculum that enables people to teach according to their personality. We have some people that do lots of songs and music and other people use drama and puppets. Other people use PowerPoint and talk and kids work in workbooks. The curriculum is big enough that it fits your personality and you don't have to do it alone," Ros shares.

### Current challenges and prayer

One of the challenges for the SRE classroom at the moment is the slow uptake in

new teachers. Ros says that during the height of COVID, a lot of teachers became concerned about their own health needs and weren't confident to return to the classroom.

"I think the current challenge is getting uni students and young people to teach SRE. There don't seem to be as many uni age as there have been in the past. I think maybe the way uni isn't Monday to Friday and little bits of the day anymore, people can just put all of their uni timetabling into a couple of days and then maybe they work the other days. So, there doesn't seem to be as many free spots of the day that you can't do anything with, where people would have previously come in and taught SRE here and there," Ros said.

"We can be praying for more teachers. We can be praying that the teachers we have will be sharing Jesus faithfully. We can be praying for the students that they will be engaged and making connections with their lives with what they're being taught, we can be praying for PYNWSW in trying to smooth the process for the teachers," she continued.

Something else Ros spoke of, was the need for financial support through PYNWSW.

She shared that the money that is donated goes towards training and ensuring that PYNWSW and SRE are up to date with the Department of Education's standards. It also goes towards training SRE teachers and liaising with the Department of Education as needed.

Please pray for, and consider supporting PYNWSW and the SRE team as they work to bring Jesus to kids in public schools. Pray for funding and access, particularly where they may face challenges and opposition to the gospel.



## Order your PY history book now!

**PY has finally received printed copies of the PY history of camping book and they are available for purchase!**

Electronic versions are free but if you would like to have a more substantial book that would make a great Christmas gift or addition to any coffee table, you can order the printed one (\$60 including postage) here: <https://pynsw-camping-history.paperform.co/>

# Ministry Amid health battles

**When Tara Prince lists out what is important to her in life, she mentions three things: her relationship with God, her husband and kids, and good health.**

She mentions good health specifically, as she has been plagued with chronic illness for the past six years which has meant seeking good health has served as a driving force and helped her to love those around her better.

Due to the illness she has faced, Tara struggled with being able to work and had been looking for work that she could do physically that would also involve the skills she already had as a social worker; listening, talking and being relational.

“I had a really rough time in this period of bad health, and you never know how much time in your life you have left and how much time you’re well enough to do things. I really wanted to use whatever time I had left to be able to grow God’s kingdom and be a part of it,” she said.

“I went to MTS Recruit and found out more from Russell Smidt, who was my minister and later would become my trainer.”

Tara decided that she would do an MTW MTS METRO Apprenticeship at her church, New Life Presbyterian Church in Canberra, with her minister Russell Smidt as her trainer.

- The MTW Apprenticeship is designed to prepare women for all types of ministries. With teaching and mentoring components, and the chance to discuss topics with other women, MTW is a tailored course that equips women to serve Christ in every sphere of life.
- METRO is a committee of the Presbyterian Church in NSW (PCNSW) that sponsors suitable people into ministry training apprenticeships and partners with MTS.

“I was drawn to doing it at my church, not only due to my good working relationship with Russell, but also because I felt like my strengths were encouraging Christians in growing their relationship with the Lord and encouraging them that way,” she said.

“I’m not a born evangelist or speaker but I’ve got one to one relationship skills and I just really wanted to nurture that in women at our church to serve through discipling other women so that we might have a culture of discipleship.”

## Studying the Timothy Partnership Certificate

Tara also decided that she would study the Timothy Partnership Certificate while she undertook her apprenticeship.

“Russell had talked through that I could do it [an apprenticeship] without a study element, but I just really thought any other time where I’ve done study and there’s been an opportunity to implement, is where I’ve done the best type of learning,” she said. “I’d al-



Tara’s husband, Jason, son Liam, daughter Beth, and Tara.

ways wanted to study more about God and the Bible.”

Training for the Timothy Partnership Certificate is offered online. MTS apprentices study the Academic Studies in Theology Certificate (ASTC) through Christ College. The certificate is a course that enables every Christian everywhere to be better equipped to read and understand the Bible.

Tara’s apprenticeship generally consisted of two days of ministry and one day of study per week.

“I was doing more study than regular full-time apprentices because I was also doing the MTW course, the women’s ministry training that went along with it, and the Timothy Partnership Certificate. That was five lectures a semester plus a couple of assignments each semester.”

But she loved it!

Tara said she loved studying the Timothy Partnership Certificate, particularly the lectures which were in the format of several lecturers having group discussions. She said these elements really helped her to engage in the content and stay focused during the lecture.

“I learned a lot from it. I did an Old Testament subject first, and I remember I would listen, I was trying so hard to get absolutely everything. So, I’d sit there and listen five minutes at a time, and as I couldn’t write very well, I could only write for about half an hour, and then I’d have to stop.



Women from New Life Presbyterian attending Canberra Women’s Conference with Tara.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 27**



## Talua Accreditation: A ‘Ho-Hum’ Headline?



Talua Staff with the Accreditation Team

Sometimes headlines fail to tell the real story.

When we read something like ‘Talua Accreditation’ we might be tempted to think ‘So what? That sounds fairly routine.’ But it’s far from routine!

A few years ago the Government of Vanuatu established a new body to audit and then register educational institutions in Vanuatu. As a result of this, some significant institutions had their registration withdrawn. Over the last few years, the Talua staff and friends in Australia have been working very hard in an attempt to meet the new standards. The Talua registration audit was completed just last week.

The result? The audit team has recommended that Talua be awarded a rating of ‘Good’, which given the challenges that Talua has faced, is a brilliant outcome for which we praise God. (Many institutions facing challenges similar to Talua have been rated as ‘Poor’.)

Rob Falls writes:

“Acting Principal Pastor Philip was tearing up as he closed the audit in prayer, and when he asked us all to sing the Chorus ‘We Give All the Glory to Jesus’, it was the most spectacular four part rendition, sung from the depths of all our hearts. The result was based on the mammoth efforts the audit team observed in our work over the last 12 months.”

Some of the factors contributing to the result were:

- The work of Dr Graham Pratt (father of Christ College lecturer, Dr Jon Pratt) in helping Talua with Strategic Planning and Governance.
- Strong partnerships with overseas partners.
- Strong adherence to all of the requirements regarding course accreditation - Tom Richards from the Westminster Presbyterian Church, played a significant part in this.
- The quality of Talua’s infrastructure, the vast majority of which is due to the donations from the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in rebuilding after cyclone Harold in 2020, as well as the many PresAID appeals directed towards Talua over the last several years.
- The significant internet and wireless upgrade which was completed a week prior to the audit by James Turnbull from Hornsby Presbyterian Church.
- The work done on redeveloping Talua’s policies over the last six months, by Jess Priest from Gateway Presbyterian Church, Anna Bay.
- The plan to install solar power in mid-November this year with the PresAID ‘Light Up Talua’ Appeal.
- And of course, the hard work by all the Talua staff!

As you read through the list, you can see how God used the gifts of many people to contribute to this result. Some of our readers will recognise the part that they have played in this positive outcome, even in a small way, through donations over the last few years. Thank you for your partnership in what God is doing through Talua to honour His name!



Talua Women’s Program Participants



## Giving Thanks and Praising God Matt and Kate Vinicombe



In September, Wei-Han Kuan from CMS Victoria issued the following update on Matt and Kate Vinicombe.

“We have been praying for and supporting the Vinicombe family since their motor vehicle accident on Christmas Day 2022. Their’s has been a long and complex journey filled with many challenges and griefs, but also thanksgivings and answered prayer.

Matt and Kate’s various insurances have finally been approved. This means that with sadness they have resigned as missionaries of CMS. Kate expects to be discharged from hospital and join the family in their new home shortly. She will continue to receive rehabilitation care.

Please continue to pray for Matt and Kate, Bethany, Chloe and Amos; their extended family; and their church family at Bundoora Presbyterian. Their journey of healing continues, as does the story of God’s powerful work of grace in and through the faithful witness of their lives.

The Scriptures insist that when ‘bad things’ happen, God often uses them for his own good purposes. We have seen this in the tremendous response to our calls to prayer. We have seen this in the \$1.1M raised for the special assistance fund. We continue to see this in Kate and Matt’s steadfast public testimony of faith in Christ amidst their circumstances. For each of these, we give thanks and praise to God.

Our gospel work among our indigenous sisters and brothers on Groote Eylandt and across North Australia continues. Thank you and thank God for the Vinicombes’ part in this. None of their work or love is in vain. We keep praying for a North Australia That Knows Jesus.”

## 1.5 kilometres of ethernet cable! Upgrading the Talua WiFi!



In Australia we take access to the internet for granted. It’s always ‘there’. But until recently that was not the case at Talua. When students, and most staff, wanted to use the internet they had to go to the Talua library. Only a few of Talua’s 35-odd buildings had access to the internet via WiFi.

In the last few months that has changed.

In early September James and Angela Turnbull, from Rob and El Falls’ home church, Hornsby Presbyterian, travelled to Talua to upgrade the campus’ WiFi capacity. This meant far more than plugging in a few new routers. The project saw the installation of approximately \$18,000+ of equipment and cables to enable the WiFi signal to reach the whole campus. This involved digging extensive trenches and rolling out 1.5 kilometres of cable and installing 20 WiFi access points.

We praise God for James and Angela’s ministry, Hornsby’s partnership, the Talua community and the significant contribution and expertise of the team at Real World Technology Solutions [Andrew Yager (Cherrybrook Presbyterian Church), David Furey, and Tom Harkness], in supporting this very significant project.

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# God Speaks Our Language: The Life and Work of Pastor Bill and Sue Camden

**God Speaks Our Language: The Life and Work of Pastor Bill and Sue Camden, was launched December 3 at the Epping Presbyterian Church Hall at 11 am following the 9.30am Morning Service.**

Rev Bill Ives, who did his theological training with Bill, launched the book and guests were invited to speak of their memories of the couple on the day.

Bill Camden was Moderator of the PCNSW in 1984, the only ordained NSW Moderator never to have held a parish in NSW.

In his Forward at the front of the book, Christ College principal, Ian Smith, discusses how the book came to be and its importance.

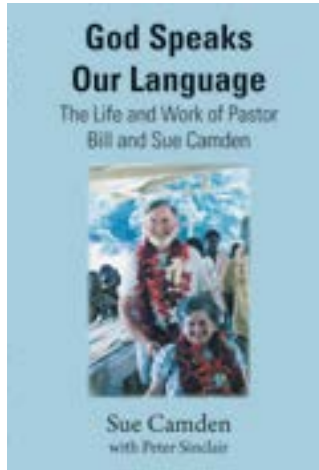
“In December 1994, at Bill Camden’s Sydney funeral, the Reverend Peter Boase challenged the congregation that someone needed to write Bill’s story. There is one person who is more qualified than anyone to do the task. It is wonderful that Sue Camden has been able to write not just Bill’s story, but their story, for it has been a partnership.

Nearly three decades have passed since Bill’s funeral, and this distance of time has its benefits.

Firstly, Bill would have recoiled at a hagiographic missionary story in his honour written in the emotion of the time. A verse that was instrumental not only in his conversion but also throughout his life was, “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). He would eschew any adulation.



Sue Camden with Rev Bill Ives taken at a book launch in September 2018. Five years since this was taken and Sue is now 91 and Bill 95. Bill Ives was Sue’s parish minister when her family worshipped at Eastwood PC before Church union in 1977.



Secondly, there has arisen a generation of missionaries who live in a world of increased and instantaneous communication that is very different from the context of 60 years ago. Yet, the modern missionary movement stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before. It is good for this generation who knew not the Camdens (and many others like them) to know and appreciate their story.”

Mr Smith says Bill and Sue’s work in Vanuatu was unique, but the challenges they faced were not uncommon.

“Thirdly, and probably most importantly, the reason I am pleased for the delay in the writing of this book is that we can see the legacy of Bill and Sue’s ministry.

The legacy of Bill and Sue’s ministry is easy to see. Today, throughout the islands of Vanuatu, each Lord’s Day morning, people hear God’s word read and proclaimed in Bislama.

Today, the Bible is the most significant translation work in the national language. In a very real sense, this has united a linguistically diverse people not only around a common language, but also, for most of the population of Vanuatu, around a common belief. For Bill and Sue, and many missionaries before them, their expectation was that the Gospel would transform not only individuals, but society.

This can be seen today in churches, as well as in schools, hospitals, government, and the very fabric of society. Christianity has not replaced traditional culture, it has redeemed it, and those who would argue otherwise would be wise to appreciate this distinction.

This is not just the story of a missionary family in Vanuatu; it is also the story of the centrality of the Bible. Bill lamented his own theological education that was eroded by the influences of liberalism. He worked hard to ensure that future generations both in Vanuatu and in Australia prioritised the Bible in training their future leaders.

Bill understood the need for Presbyterians to work in co-operation with other Christian traditions – influences for good upon Bill and Sue’s lives from such interdenominational organisations as the Evangelical Union at university and Scripture Union had profound influences upon them. In their missionary work, they recognised that they could not do it all, and the translation of the Old Testament was done by a highly united inter-denominational team.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 27**



*“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**

## Meet Lachlan Armytage, Orange’s first METRO apprentice

**Tell us about the church you’re serving in and your role there.**

I’m working as a METRO apprentice at Orange Presbyterian Church in rural NSW. Our church is fairly large for this area; we have two services with a total of around 250 people. I’ve been serving here as the church’s first METRO apprentice since the beginning of 2022, being trained by one of our ministers, Angus Gibb. I’ve been involved in a wide range of things during my apprenticeship, but my focus has been running our church’s youth group and looking after the 30-odd kids who attend.

**What have been some of the highlights of the METRO Program and what you have been learning?**

An MTS METRO apprenticeship is a great way to experience church ministry first-hand, and work out if you would be a good fit for full-time ministry. And that’s exactly what this apprenticeship has been for me; I’ve loved being able to experience a range of different things in church life – from service leading and preaching, to working with English as a second language speakers, to mentoring and training up young leaders. A major highlight for me has been our church’s youth

ministry program, which I’ve been in charge of during my apprenticeship. It’s been great to see the youth group grow, and I’ve loved being involved in these kids’ lives, building relationships and teaching the Gospel. Earlier this year we had eleven kids decide to receive baptism and become members of the church, which was so encouraging to see! I love when teenagers finally understand a concept from the Bible and their eyes light up, and this apprenticeship has shown me that youth ministry is something I want to continue to work and grow in into the future.

**How can we be praying for you?**

I’m coming towards the end of my apprenticeship at the end of this year, so please be praying that my trainer and I can finish this season well. I’ve actually decided to continue working here at the church as the Youth Worker which I’m really excited about, but that will come with its own changes and routine adjustments. Please also give thanks for the work God has already done through my role at Orange Presbyterian Church, and that he would continue to work powerfully into the future! We are so blessed to have something like the METRO program, to help train and equip young leaders who are thinking about ministry.



Orange Presbyterian Church has much to look forward to with Metro apprentice, Lachlan Armytage, taking on the Youth Ministry role



## God's global family partners to protect refugees from trafficking

**It is hard to comprehend that today there are around 103 million forcibly displaced people around the world, with 32.5 million being refugees (UNHCR, 2022). The risks facing people on the move are extensive, but the option of not leaving is often more dangerous.**

The loss of protective community networks, social and cultural isolation, experiences of trauma and little access to resources or work mean that people forced to flee from home are extremely vulnerable to human trafficking.

Forcibly displaced people may be trafficked multiple times on their journey and in their destination country.

Since the start of the Ukraine war, SIM For Freedom has been part of the European Freedom Network's rapid response team working to keep Ukrainian refugees safe as they fled.

Essential safety tips for refugees were given out at border crossings - vital information that enabled thousands of women and children to evade traffickers seeking to prey on those fleeing the conflict.

Partnering with APWM, For Freedom has collaborated with partners on the ground to assist Ukrainian families seeking refuge in Bulgaria. Emergency aid, safe accommodation, medical care and trauma counselling continues to be provided for vulnerable families.

Set Free Foundation Program Director, Peta Ann wrote, 'Thank you so much for the support provided for the Ukrainian families in Bulgaria. We cannot explain on paper what a difference it has made in their lives, but please know that your service has humbled and impacted these families.'

Olena's\* family is one of the families who fled with her two children, leaving her husband behind to fight. She says:

*"We come from Kherson, our house there was destroyed. We escaped from the front door while being attacked. We were scared for our lives and the lives of our children. We finally made it to Bulgaria. In that moment it was very hard. We were without money, clothes. We had nothing with us. I just had my documents and my kids. It was scary, and if it wasn't for the people who helped us, we wouldn't have survived. I am very thankful for the help of the church and your organisation helped that paid for our apartment. I am so thankful because I can't pay those high rent alone. I wish with all my soul you and your family's peace, health, warmth and all the best. You make it possible for us to live and survive in this difficult time. I bow down to you and thank you for all the help and care. Thank you so much."*

Friends, how wonderful to come together as God's people in this global partnership expressing love for our neighbours in need.

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*

### For Prayer

- Those in situations of human trafficking and slavery; pray for those who have been trafficked and for those who are the traffickers, that all may know the freedom, love and grace of our Lord Jesus.
- That For Freedom may continue to equip and partner for effective prevention of trafficking in the 70+ countries where SIM works.

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# APWM

## Australian Presbyterian World Mission NSW

## APWM NSW ReachOut Stanley Leong — APWMNSW Committee Member

“Could I have one of your bottles?” he asked.  
“Sure” I replied, as I grabbed a bottle for him.  
“It’s a nice size for when I go biking. It will fit well in the bottle holder.”  
“Now, before I give this to you, do you know anything about APWM?” I asked.  
“No, tell me something about APWM?” He asked as I handed him the bottle.  
“Australian Presbyterian World Mission is the mission arm of the Presbyterian Church; we are the NSW Branch.” I replied.  
“Do you know what makes us different from other mission agencies?”  
“You’re new” He replied.  
“No, we’ve been around for a while.” I replied and then added “we’re very low key”  
“How’s that” he asked.  
“We work with the other agencies in the room, some Presbyterian churches do mobilise some people to go directly, but most go through one of these agencies.” I said.  
“You learn something every day.” he replied.  
“Yes, you do” I retorted. “Hope the bottle works for you?”  
“It will”

Most conversations went along these lines. We met a couple of other APWM missionaries who were manning the other agency stands. They were happy to connect and have a chat. The other agency representatives who walked by mentioned that they had a APWM missionaries with their agency.

One of the main aims of attending Reachout was not to recruit, but to inform of what the APWM does and to be a presence within the missions world supporting our people with other agencies.

We give thanks to God for allowing ReachOut to be a success! 309 people left blessed, encouraged, inspired and understanding of what Mission could be for them. 39 organisations were present to tell the story of Mission.

### **Matt George European Christian Mission (ECM) Partner Agency Mission Partner APWM**

What’s your vision for missions? For Kevin Hoovey, keynote speaker at ReachOut, there is a far better question for those thinking about being more involved in global mission. He said we should first consider missionaries and mission agencies that are labouring away in different locations. Ask the question: What’s their vision for missions and would you fit into God’s mission with them?

ReachOut conference was an opportunity for us as one of 39 missionary organisations to help people consider how they might fit, whether to “go” or partner better with those



The ReachOut Conference was a display of unity in the gospel and mission across denominations

who do. Lots of Sydneysiders came for the first time to this conference, given it was held in the beautiful grounds of Pacific Hills Christian School in Dural, Sydney (not in the usual setting of Katoomba Christian Convention).

European Christian Mission (ECM) and other mission agencies had many productive conversations over the lollies on our table. ECM had a team of five to help answer people’s queries. Our message could be summed up as “Come and Help us”, echoing the vision of the Man from Macedonia, by which God directed Paul to become the first missionary to Europe.

I personally find ReachOut a very refreshing display of the unity we have in the gospel and gospel mission across denominational and organisational lines. The conference organisers and groups present work together very effectively. There is no competition but a real spirit of cooperation as we encourage those attending to serve in God’s worldwide mission.

### **Mike Kim APWMNSW Committee Member**

A most encouraging gathering of likeminded people with a common focus... to serve in mission. It was good to meet many of these who rely on God and believe in the power of prayer. It was encouraging to meet many young people who have a strong passion for missions and are willing to serve. Guest speakers took the opportunity to ask such questions, “Are you preparing yourself for the mission field?” There are so many options for those who would like to serve be it within our own country or overseas.

For those mission representatives at ReachOut who have served in missions this was a great opportunity to encourage others in all steps and to be prayerful for those wanting to serve in missions.



# SAFETY SPOT with Hazel Nisbet

## Safety Guidelines and Forms on our Church Website

Have you looked at 'WHS Guidelines for our Church Organisations' on our church web page?

**These can be found at [pcnsw.org.au](http://pcnsw.org.au) under 'Resources' then 'Work Health and Safety'**

There are also forms and templates on the website, including WHS policy and forms for managing: induction and training, accident, incident and near misses, hazards, first aid, chemicals, asbestos and contractors.

There is access to request and consent forms for ministry activities and templates and worked examples for risk assessment and planning, for example, working bees, preschool and children's ministry activities, youth camp, short term mission etc.

It is recommended that a Safety Officer is chosen from the Committee of Management (CoM). The Safety Officer ensures WHS is tabled and prioritised, and that WHS (including all accidents, incidents and hazards) are discussed at each CoM meeting.

WHS legislation may seem daunting, especially for small congregations but can be manageable by adopting an approach towards continual improvement, for example aiming to tackle one outstanding WHS issue per month.

Our WHSE Manager, Hazel Nisbet, is available to assist with health and safety matters and is open to feedback so that we can improve these online resources.

### For further information contact:

Hazel Nisbet  
WHSE Manager  
[hnisbet@pcnsw.org.au](mailto:hnisbet@pcnsw.org.au)  
0414 463 976



## ► PROFILE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

For Stuart, returning to PIM is like coming home.

An ordained PCA minister since 1990, he had just concluded 19 years with Fremantle PC in WA when he was called to the Superintendent's role.

"I had served as Superintendent from 2005 to 2015 in a part-time capacity, and then the part-time position concluded, so I reverted to local church ministry only. Recently, the full-time ministry opened up, and PIM called me back to it".

He follows Hugh Castleton, who was PIM CEO and concluded at the end of June.

"I haven't been involved in PIM in recent years; the call came out of the blue, but we felt this was for us. I have had a long-term interest in Gospel ministry and have been involved in ministry in Alice Springs, Darwin, and other places in outback Australia.

"We came from Britain 50 years ago as migrants."

Stuart became a Christian at high school after having what he describes as a "nominal Christian background".

"I heard the voice of God in the Gospel when about 18 in Busselton in WA, then came to believe by the grace of God and became convinced of the truth of the Reformed Christianity."

He attended the University of WA and the PTC Melbourne in the 1980s, exited to a church plant in Joon-dalup, then served in a suburban church before being involved in PIM in the early 90s while serving in an inner urban church in Melbourne and became Superintendent for the first time, then moved to an inner-city church in Fremantle and from there being called and being appointed Superintendent by the GAA recently.

"I am very excited about coming into the role. There is, rightly, lots of focus and Gospel work in the cities, coastal areas, and overseas. Still, our focus (PIM) is on 'the missing middle of mission' .... the 70 per cent of the continent that people could describe as being inland and outback ... there are probably one million people in that area. But often, it is not really on the horizon .... while there are some good ministries, there is always room for more work. PIM is trying to ramp up New Dunesk to inspire, train, equip and send out more gospel workers".

"The focus for me initially is to go and see the work, meet the workers, see what's being done and as 'first among equals' in terms of tasks, to strengthen the ministry at New Dunesk. The PIM Committee and I see that as the great priority".

"I will be trying to promote a prayer movement. We have developed a prayer bookmark. We believe Jesus said pray to the Lord of the harvest; if we pray to the Lord of the harvest, he will do everything necessary for a good harvest".

Stuart said he was looking at a period of consolidation, refocussing, and ultimately fresh advance for PIM by the grace of God.

"Generally, there has been a depopulation taking place in many areas of the outback, with the focus not being on the remote and country areas like it once was ...on the other hand, the growth of Australian 'megacities' means we are like almost separate countries...there is disconnection growing in many ways."

As for the future, Stuart said he was now in the latter stages of ministry, being in his 60s, but would like to keep going with PIM ([pim.org.au](http://pim.org.au)) as long as he could, while the committee wanted him and as the Lord let him.

► **MINISTRY AMID HEALTH BATTLES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19**

"I literally took four months to write one essay all about the Babylonian exile and I learned so much about it, but my expectation of what I needed to put into it, the amount of reading and everything was kind of way off. I gradually decreased my expectation of how much work to put in. By the end, I was just going from one assignment to the next and wouldn't start the next one until the first one was done. I learned better how to structure things."

**The value of a ministry apprenticeship**

Since finishing her studies and apprenticeship, Tara has been exploring options for ministry work. She believes that studying and doing a ministry apprenticeship is a valuable thing for women to do, as "There's a great need for women to be growing in their serving ability and being trained in correct theology".

"Initially when we started women's ministry, there was a great desire to grow connections between women. We were able to grow the focus of women's minis-

try on discipleship and how older women can help younger women deepen their relationship with God."

"I think ministry apprenticeships really help to equip you in whatever ministry you're going to do in the future, but it also helps you understand, if it's in a church, what your ministry team is going through and the challenges that they face and have more sympathy for the things that they're grappling with every week," Tara continued.

"I remember hearing at MTS Recruit, 'Why not? Why not do a ministry apprenticeship?' You don't have to try and work out the reasons why you should do it - just do it! I think that was the final thing; I'm just gonna do it. Having my life kind of fall apart a bit, gave me that option to think, 'What would God like me to be doing and what can I do in the future for Him and His kingdom?'".

"It's so valuable to study and to have ministry experience. There are so many good things that come about as a result of growing in loving God more, and loving His people more is a big part of that," she concluded.

► **GOD SPEAKS OUR LANGUAGE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22**

But when such "co-operation" meant the watering down of the centrality and the authority of Scripture, it was a bridge too far. Sue points out the pain and commitment that led Bill and many others to spearhead the formation of a continuing Presbyterian church in the wake of Church Union in 1977.

For those of us in the Presbyterian Church of Australia today, who are still committed to working in Vanuatu, who have seen a growing commitment to the authority of Scripture in our own denomination, who still walk the path between co-operation and compromise, we realise that those who have gone before have left us a legacy for which, I for one, am grateful, and will work to preserve.

I know the Bill and Sue Camden story well. I met them 50 years ago and married their eldest daughter, but as I have read through this book, I have heard familiar stories in a new light. Sue has let us in to that which is seldom seen. We learn of motivations, struggles and delights. We are introduced to a couple who have dedicated themselves to the service of their Master. It's not a book about them, but about their Lord who called them to take up their cross and follow Him."

Copies of the books are \$15 each.

They can be obtained by post plus handling and postage by emailing David Camden

camden.david@optusnet.com.au

► **JUDGMENT FULFILLED CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28**

trusted in the covenant rather than obeyed what it stipulated. Jeremiah 39 is a preview of a greater judgment (Matthew 25:34, 41). How do we cope with facing our Maker?

When John Lennon was shot dead in December 1980 Yoko Ono said that 'though he has now joined the greater force, he is still with us.' She wishes it were so.

The Word of God tell us there will be two possible destinies: under the wrath of God or under the mercy and protection of God.

Zedekiah and so much of Jerusalem fell under the wrath of God while Jeremiah and Ebed-Melech were under His mercy and protection.

Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be saved - that is the Bible's promise.

Call upon His name and in the day of wrath, you will be preserved.

*Through every period of my life  
Thy goodness I'll pursue,  
And after death in distant worlds  
The glorious theme renew*

(Joseph Addison, 1672-1719).

# JUDGMENT FULFILLED

JEREMIAH 39

**J**

eremiah 39 and 52 (and 2 Kings 25 for that matter) tell of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Forty years before this, when God first called Jeremiah, He promised two things:

- (a) His judgment on Judah (Jeremiah 1:11-15)
- (b) His deliverance of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:8, 19).

In Jeremiah 39 we see the fulfilment of these two promises. Jerusalem fell to the marauding Babylonians, but Jeremiah was preserved. So human history is not just a succession of random events, but as John Bright writes: 'History is a judgment upon sin.'

Certainly, that was true for Judah at this time. In many ways this was the most disastrous event in Judah's history - the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and the earthly Davidic kingship.

### God judges His covenant people.

This was an appalling event. The siege of Jerusalem went on for 18 long months (39:1-2). During the siege, the city ran out of food (see Lamentations 4:6, 9-10). To use the image from Jeremiah 1, the boiling pot from the north was being poured all over Jerusalem. We see this in three main ways:

- (a) Punishment of the king, Zedekiah (39:4-5). He tried to flee but was caught near Jericho. Then, at the age of 32, he suffered greatly (39:6-7). The last thing that he witnessed on this earth was the execution of his sons and the nobles of Judah. This was followed by his being taken off in fetters to Babylon where he died. We can only feel sorry for him, but he was warned often enough (37:1-2; 38:20-24). There are warnings enough in Scripture - 'Flee from the wrath to come' (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Anybody not understand what those words mean? Of course not! Anybody not want to understand what those words mean? Ah, that is a different story.
- (b) The destruction of Jerusalem (39:8). The palace, the houses, and the walls were all destroyed. The temple itself was destroyed (52:13). God declared war on His own city and on His own temple. Mount Zion, the city of our God, was reduced to a heap of rubble.
- (c) The struggles of the people (39:9-10). The skilled artisans were deported to Babylon while the peasants were left to eke out an existence as best they could.

This is not 'once upon a time' stuff.

This is history - datable (586 BC) and part of a campaign which is referred to in other ancient documents, notably the Lachish letters. All this happened to Zion, the joy of the whole earth, the city of which glorious things are spoken. So proclaimed Psalms 48 and 87, but now it is a wreck.



The principle is that God's covenant people are accountable to Him (Amos 3:2). God's king, God's place, God's people – all in the covenant yet not saved.

The fact that Israel could point to Moses and Abraham was no more help to them than it will be for Christians to point to John Bunyan or John Newton. The point in Jeremiah 39 is that God's wrath fell not on the pagans but on God's covenant people.

### God preserves His faithful prophet.

God had promised to protect Jeremiah in the midst of all his troubles, and He does so (39:11-14).

He keeps His promises, not through Zedekiah the king of Judah. It was Zedekiah who had let Jeremiah languish in prison. It was Nebuchadnezzar and his captain Nebuzaradan - two idolatrous pagans - who released Jeremiah from prison, and let him go home. God never says how He will keep His promises, only that He will keep them.

The integrity of God is at stake here. Can we trust His promises? God had committed himself to Jeremiah.

So, while Jeremiah was arrested, imprisoned, beaten, thrown down a miry well, he was preserved to the end. Not because of good luck or friends in high places or a suitable star sign, but because God had given him promises and God cannot lie.

### God preserves those who work for His kingdom.

God also preserved Ebed-Melech (39:15-18). Who is Ebed-Melech, you ask? The name means 'servant of the king'. We find him back in Jeremiah 38:6-13.

In an evil day he pleaded for Jeremiah's life, even at the risk of his own. This is what Jesus meant in two of His rather enigmatic sayings about losing one's life and so saving it (Matthew 16:24-25; 10:40-42).

Ebed-Melech was not a prophet but he received a prophet in the name of a prophet, and so received a prophet's reward.

Ebed-Melech knew fear (v.17), but he also trusted in the Lord (v.18). This overcame his fear, and he did what was right. That is the lesson for us. God preserved a man who was a relatively insignificant figure, an Ethiopian (Cushite - NIV), a Gentile, one whose faith overcame his natural fear. God's wrath was poured out on His covenant people, but this Gentile is preserved and protected by the God of Israel.

Zedekiah laughed at God's Word too often, the temple housed idols as well as the glory of God, the people

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 27**