

the pulse

PRESBYTERIAN



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Autumn is a season of change and a season of hope as it takes us into and beyond Easter.

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Danger or Adventure?

By Rev Lyle Sims

One of the activities which used to be well loved among some youth groups was that of bonnet sliding.

If you are not familiar with this sport it involves attaching a curvy bonnet (think 50 inch or 60 inch - about 171cm) upside-down with a reasonably long length of rope to tow it behind a ute.

Oh, I forgot to mention there was usually a young person or child sitting down in it, as it whizzed along in crop stubble or slippery grass.

It wasn't just that the sensation of sliding close to the ground but like a water skier, it was the taking of the corners and the centrifugal force that brought the exhilaration and laughter.

Being the 1980's there weren't too many safety features: Sunglasses, to prevent grass getting into one's eyes, a metal kitchen chair, lowered and welded down into the back, the offer of a helmet.

I should say, in keeping with current WH&S practices, that this activity would no longer be approved. So as is said, "Please don't try this at home!" Whilst I can't speak for everywhere, I know that our activity was mostly conducted on private properties, and always with experienced drivers and observers.

Grass Sliding had any number of risks but they were minimized by what used to be called, 'common sense' and now is known as 'precautions', 'risk assessment' and 'controls'.

It is always worth thinking and asking, in all activity, youth or otherwise, "Does this have the potential for something to go wrong?" In all of life we measure risk.

We measure it at pedestrian crossings, we



measure it if changing jobs, showing hospitality, choosing schools for your children, even deciding what to say or what not to say.

It's strange then in 2025 that we've become savvy in managing personal risk, accident risk, financial risk, and any other numbers of risks.

But I suspect not very thoughtful of Theological risk.

We understand such safety features in cars of airbags and pre-tensioning seat belts, side intrusion bars, and reversing cameras, but when it comes to sound theology, and a solid knowledge and confidence with the Scriptures many of us I fear have more in common with "Dad and Dave" and 'Russel Coyt' than those who can differentiate between danger and adventure.

The sufficiency of Scripture, the Authority of Scripture, the special revelation that God gives which is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ is all too often passed over in favour of 'new ways', 'modern philosophies', 'new ethics', what religious practitioners may exercise within the ear canals to the masses, a little long tickling 'stick' to satisfy a small but demanding religious itch.

In 2 Timothy 3 and 4 the young man Timothy is warned not to neglect the scriptures because, in his day as with our own, there is plenty to divert the attention and the love of believers away from Christ and away from the Word of God.

Many of us face pressure and a plethora of information and so-called 'news' that comes at us in every conceivable form, and with every acidic attack, it tries to wash our attachment to biblical truth down the drain of postmodern and leftist expediency.

This pressure, sadly, sometimes comes from those we trust and perhaps even love, that there would be a pulling apart and a dissolving around the foundations of our faith.

In Matthew 7 Jesus concludes His message to His followers and the crowds with the imagery of two places of life, two houses, one built on the sand, one built on the rock. Each had the same trials; each, we assume, the same opportunities.

But with one, the owner listened and took heed to the things Christ said, but the other did not.

One stood secure, one succumbed to a shifting foundation, a danger real and immanent, and it fell; not as we might imagine a nice neat pile of useable timber and bricks and roofing materials all in their respective places, after minor adjustment to the boundary lines, or surveyed place, but it fell, and great, or catastrophic, was the fall of it! It proved a dangerous house to dwell in.

You may recall in the news just recently that house on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, that slid down the slope, and ended up a pile of rubble in the street below. Its initial movements may only have been incremental.

But what does that matter now? The Engineers who'd inspected it are telling; they said; "It was an accident waiting to happen!"

None of us want that said of our lives, nor of our own church.

None of us desire to wake up in the wreckage where not just one support is a 'risk' but all that we'd thought of as support was undone; where all truth is disconnected.

Is it perhaps true that we've not, of late, looked at where our foundation for life is? Do we take

it for granted that if someone sounds as if they have authority to speak about our world, or are approved of by others that they can re-interpret what scripture says, or pillory certain places of scripture as though they knew better than God, and better than what the plain simple reading of the scriptures, and of scripture compared with itself, interpreting itself, should be discounted and ignored.

There is a lot at risk. For if we unravel the truth of the reliability of scripture, we find ourselves also unraveling the very core of what it means for us to be human and to be responsible to a God who is able to speak, able to reveal Himself through words.

It's not wrong for us to be discerning, in fact we need to be that way. To have that Berean spirit to weigh all things by the scriptures.

(Acts 17:10-11) The line between danger and adventure is not always easy to discern, but if you and I will remember our foundation, In Christ alone, in what He does and says, we will not commence a slide away from God that will be neither good for our health nor our safety.



The gift of time and courage to change

My daughter turned 18 last year and from the moment that birthday was celebrated, I felt a great load of expectation from 'others' about how I was suddenly supposed to "let her be an adult".

Never mind that she was still at school, still financially and emotionally dependent on me, the single mum who had raised her alone for all but four of her 18 years and that she herself didn't want to change a thing at that particular time.

Apparently I was to stop doing things with and for her - especially the things we loved to do together, was to encourage her to do what she didn't want to, and take up drinking alcohol and partying with her friends, and let her make all her own decisions, even if those decisions could result in her failing the Higher School Certificate and dashing a career dream she had held since she was four years of age, due to some negative influences.

The pressure of this situation was almost too much for me to bear...it was like the empty nest syndrome had struck overnight.

One day she was 17 and still my teen school girl. Next day she was 18 and I was supposed to...do something...

I was distraught, anxious and afraid...until we turned up at church (together) and let our loving Christian family enfold us with reassurances that we were doing well, I was being a good mum, and we didn't 'have' to change anything.

Anxiety is something I have dealt with regularly during the past 18 years. Anxiety and self doubt. I've carried the burden of mothering completely alone. I've worked a minimum of two jobs at a time to try to give her all of the opportunities I could. Anxiety has often made me sick.

I've cared for her alone when injured and sick (and when I've been injured and sick). Made all



the decisions, carried the financial burdens (a single parent cannot get sick and cannot risk not being able to work), and done what my own late dad advised - give your child your time. "The greatest gift," he would say, "is your time". (Interestingly, our PWA president has written on that exact subject in this edition - check out Gwendolyn Cowell's article).

Despite the intense anxiety I felt over that birthday period and during the dreaded months of the Higher School Certificate, she has now turned 19 and all of the terrible things I dreaded have not happened.

She is still with me, for now, enjoying her gap year and excitedly planning a future when she will be more independent of me.

Things have changed, just like readers will notice the Pulse has changed this month, with a new look and a new seasonal schedule. Are changes bad? No! They are a gift! Without change we can not grow. My daughter is growing. I am growing and the Pulse, now going into its 18th year is changing. This year, we endeavour to bring you more from the Bible, more from our theologians, more news from our churches, committees and schools and more of the content you want to read in a magazine that is easier to read, attractive, cost effective and Christ-centred.

We would love to receive your ideas and feedback to kforman@pcnsw.org.au



Gabi Forman, then four, now 19, with her mum and the late Rev John Thompson at the General Assembly

PIM's Snowy Patrol plans a big 2025

By Karen Forman

BOMBALA based Presbyterian Inland Mission (PIM)'s Snowy Mountains Patrol is set for another big year of ministering to and encouraging local residents.

The patrol, comprising Noah Vasiliades and wife Nerroli, is planning a big Easter celebration in what will be its third Easter in Bombala.

"This will be for us an opportunity to spend time remembering and celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the locals here in Bombala" Noah said.

"We would love people to join us for some additional teaching sessions that will answer the question, 'how does God relate to people?'. Noah Vasiliades also said, "There will be free camping at the church property, family activities, opportunities to build friendships and to encourage others, as well as an open invitation to the town to join in an Easter Sunday Service and BBQ."

The couple began their work on the Snowy Mountains Patrol in January 2023. PIM is a ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and has been taking news about Jesus throughout Australia since its foundation in 1912, by the Rev John Flynn.

Mr and Mrs Vasiliades have been working hard to engage in connecting and supporting people throughout the Gippsland area of Victoria as well as in Bombala where they are based.

"Looking back on the past year there is great encouragement to see God's faithfulness," Noah said.

"The last few months of 2024 with the market, the carols and all the other events around Christmas we finished the year very thankful for what God has been doing." Noah said 2024 had been an encouraging year. "The market was a great

opportunity to catch up with people and continue to address our need for a solid foundation on which to build our lives, our families, our towns and our country," he said.

"It was an opportunity to invite more people to our other Christmas events and activities as well as the weekly Sunday Bible study.

"The carols were a great time of encouragement and celebration of Christmas with brothers and sisters from Orange and Canberra coming down to help support our little team of locals.

"They did a truly wonderful job of playing the carols for us, to the glory of God. The weather was beautiful, so we were able to set up outside and enjoy an open-air evening, singing of Jesus' birth and engaging in conversation over good food afterwards.

"From all accounts everyone who came really enjoyed the event and we were able to get around and chat to everyone."

The team also ran a gingerbread house making morning and led a carol service in Delegate.

"With the year over, as we look forward to 2025, we have been praying for wisdom in decisions. More than ever, we are aware of needs and opportunities in and round the Snowy Mountains, and East Gippsland area.

Noah said; "I was reminded this week, you cannot do everything, so make what you can do count. God works through our weakness and limitations, showing his power through us in our dependence on him."

"We look forward with eager anticipation to what God has in store for the year ahead."

For more information, contact Noah on 0492 960 223.

The trivia of 'time'

By Gwendoline Cowell, PWA State President

The dictionary says many things about the word 'time', but to narrow it down, time is 'a short or indefinite period or space.'

How many 'times' do we use this word, plus add another to make a sentence?

How has 'time' changed us as it makes us rush, stop, query, exclaim, rely? In the Bible, God creates our amazing world and us in an incredible number of days (time).

He uses the word time as He speaks to his prophets, to save and bring His people to and from places, wars, hostage situations and even delayed the setting of the sun for a full day when Joshua spoke to God and God saved the Israelites from the Amorites. 'A Day when the Lord listened to a man': Joshua 10:12-14. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us, 'there is a time for everything' (3:1-8)

David in the Psalms speaks of God and says, 'my times are in His hands' (Ps.31.15)
Jesus also speaks the words, 'my time has not yet come, it is not yet time'. He also takes time to be with His father.

We humans let it rule our lives, determining our very steps, movement and thoughts.
'How long'? 'time management', 'being on time', 'time costs money'.

Even when we are out and about, we have a 'good time' or 'how time flies when you're having fun'.
When we turn to God and His word we read and spend 'time with God', 'a time to come and go' and

it takes 'time to know Jesus', 'all in His time'.
But do we really sit and have a 'quiet time'?

Are you spending 'timeout' with God and letting God's word wing in and renew your minds. Are you spending 'quality time' with your God?

At our PWA Christian Education Standing Committee, we seek ways to do this, by sharing God's Word and love, supporting education, PY Youth, writing devotionals and Bible studies which we share in an outreach to PWA groups and churches and communities.

In 2024 our Bible study was, 'Will your Anchor Hold'?

This year our study is 'Following in His Footsteps'.

This study approaches how we as Christians can stand firm in this world, how through Christ we can be strengthened by sharing our experiences with each other and times when God has helped us through these, in His time.

Plus, we also have great times of fellowship. This is called 'Time Out Bible Study'.

If your church family or community would like to have us spend time with you and share one of these studies, please call Time Out Christian Education Bible Study coordinator Gwendoline Cowell on 0487279249.

PROFILE

Hazel "semi retires" from Woonona after 14 years

By Karen Forman

"What a wonderful woman of God you are, Hazel".

"So thankful to you for faithfully serving our Lord in a truly mind-blowing capacity for so long."

With social media comments like these, there is no doubt that Hazel Nisbet was a loved member of the staff at Woonona Presbyterian Community Church.

And no doubt that there are a lot of people who are grateful she's only SEMI retiring and will remain serving the church and her community within the church family.

Hazel, who held the role of Go Coordinator, linking the church with the community through scripture in schools and many other initiatives has decided to semi retire so she can travel with her newly retired husband Paul and allow for a new person with a fresh approach to take it on.

Hazel was farewelled by her church family with speeches, cake and gifts and both former pastor Peter Currie, now retired, and his replacement, Rev Dal Proudfoot, were in attendance.

"Basically, the role meant I was coordinating five schools, teaching, outreach," she said.

"We also held things on site where we would invite people in, Kids' Fun Days, linking with some of the existing programs like Mission Australia and Need a Feed.

"Also, the neighbourhood connect aspects, going out and doorknocking every Wednesday, taking biscuits and chocolates at Easter and Christmas.

"Sometimes there would be an opportunity to share a story; some of those we had learned off by heart, like the parable of the pharisee and the tax collector or if I felt like providing a testimony,

which we got down to 30 seconds as people don't have long.

"More often we were praying for people or giving them the gospel and inviting them to church.

"Some were not into it, but on the whole people were very happy to have a chat and often would ask for prayer especially if experiencing sickness or family breakdown. "I can't say a lot would come to church out of it, but some would come to art therapy or gingerbread night or Overcomers."

Hazel said she felt, especially with the children's ministry, she wasn't putting the energy in she once did and thought it might be time for someone with more energy to take over.

"I will still be serving a lot in the church, in roles where I can get out of the way but stay.

Hazel plans to remain a deacon, stay on the committee of management, lead Overcomers outreach, work with the women's ministry committee and the women elders' support group, and do a bit of extra work at Presbytery.

She came to Woonona 23 years ago from the Northern Territory via the Hunter, having worked in the mining industry, where she had met her husband.

The couple have two children, Tess 21 and Jed 19.

She started attending Woonona Presbyterian Community Church in 2009.

"After having children, I realised my faith had eroded," she said. "I had been a keen Christian in my teenage years, then with uni and moving away the Bible started to sit on the shelf. Once I had children, I saw how amazing God was.

REFLECTION

"I was quite spellbound. Then I joined a grow group with Sue McMillan (now Currie) and really realised I hadn't been living a life that was obedient to or in relationship with God.

"I asked Jesus in late 2009 for a fresh start, and I found that I was healthier and more careful in relationships with people.

"I started to read the Bible; I couldn't get enough. I then studied a Diploma of Theology through the Timothy Partnership which took me six years, doing one subject a semester."

Hazel said she was grateful to her church family for drawing her in and trusting her "so early in my journey".

"I think scripture kids were one lesson ahead of me," she said with a laugh.

She also paid tribute to Dal, whom she said had made the transition from Peter Currie's retirement easy for staff members.

"When a co-worker becomes your manager it can be difficult, but it was smooth and Dal is doing a wonderful job," she said.

Hazel's replacement is Angela Marrott.

"She was formerly from the Baptist church and has worked in scripture with us in the past, and done a lot with women's ministry," she said.

"She is also just a beautiful Godly woman and has the fresh energy I feel I was lacking.

"I feel a real lightness, that it's right and can't wait to see her at work."

For now, Hazel is looking forward to taking her and Paul's new A-van for a test run at Jervis Bay, but the couple have plans to head to Broken Hill and Lightning Ridge in the future.



Christians know who we are

By Rev Andrew Campbell

I know who I am ... and I know where I am going ...

Billy Graham used to tell a story about the great scientist Albert Einstein.

Apparently, Einstein was once travelling on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of the passengers, as they used to do.

Well, when the conductor came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his coat pocket.

He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his vest pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but he still couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. It just wasn't there.

He couldn't find it.

But the conductor said, 'Professor Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.'

Well, Albert Einstein thanked him, and the conductor continued down the aisle punching his tickets. But as the conductor was ready to move to the next carriage, he turned around to see his famous passenger one more time and there was the great scientist down on his hands and knees, still looking for his ticket, now under his seat.

The conductor hurried back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, sir, don't worry, I know who you are. It's alright. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one. It's okay.'

Albert Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I am going.'

Christians know who we are. Yes, we'll fess up. Admit the truth. Face reality.

Our heart, as Jeremiah said, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. (Well, that's the old version, I remember it because my father quoted it about us children - and himself).

Yes, we're sinners. But as the Reformers said, *simul justus et peccator*. At the same time, declared and accounted righteous. Justified. Saved. Still sinners, to be sure, but through Jesus, right with God, friends with God.

How precious to me is the Shorter Catechism question and answer 33: 'Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.'

My little mother told how she was once being served in the butcher's. Apparently, I was in a pram behind her. She heard a little voice from the pram, singing:

'Only a sinner, saved by grace.
Only a sinner, saved by grace.
This is my story, to God be the glory,
Only a sinner, saved by grace.'

Well, that was 70 years ago. And that is still who I am. My identity is still a sinner, yes. Just ask my long-suffering wife. But a saved sinner, forgiven, right with God and ready for heaven.

Yes, I know who I am ... and I know where I am going ...

1 Peter 1:3,4: 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you.'



Community garden at Charlestown Presbyterian: obedience, mission, celebration

By Rev Stuart Blanch
Charlestown Presbyterian Church

He stopped walking, surprise on his face, looking down at the new garden.

"Didn't know there was still a church here," he said, adding "Looks better than lawn."
"We hope it will be full of beautiful native wildflowers after a couple of seasons," I said, feeling awkwardly our church hadn't registered with him and that the small native seedlings held more in prospect than reality only a few weeks after planting.

I explained the garden was a way for the church to point people in the community to God through his beautiful Creation.

Plus, it also helps people in the church to consider how we must care for God's Creation in obedience, recalling that God "took the man [Adam] and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15b).

Over the last few years, thanks to a small grant from our local water utility for water conservation, we have established the native garden plus built two raised garden beds for organic veggies, installed a water tank and planted five citrus trees.

For the previous 60 years, the front and one side of the church site was low maintenance couch grass lawn, hibiscus shrubs and Agapanthus lilies.

Now, people will occasionally walk off the footpath into the garden - often with trepidation and some coaxing - to pick some basil or a strawberry, let their kids explore the garden, and walk among the wildflowers.

Charlestown Presbyterian Church is near Newcastle, and the church building is centrally located in the Charlestown CBD where it is highly visible to pedestrians and drivers.

The native garden helps people stop and talk. Some have offered to donate roses and nasturtiums, and a man volunteered some of his spare marijuana plants he could give, to diversify the garden. All were politely declined.

And it helps us to be still, to listen, share a little about Jesus if we are bold, and pray for people. People living in nearby flats out to walk their dog, or to visit the shopping centre, will sometimes stop and chat.

We've had people asking why a church is into gardening, or mentioning their kids went to the youth group here decades ago, or sharing grief over a suicide, or offering they believe in God but don't go to church anymore. These are opportunities for sharing the gospel.

At times, people who are part of the church, or those walking by, share their worries.

We can point to beautiful flannel flowers, or a banksia cone, as a reminder that Jesus told his disciples not to worry, but rather to observe the 'lilies of the field', because God knows our needs and instead commands us to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6: 28-34).

The rainforest bower vines provide a metaphor for us to look up and point people to Christ on the Cross, as they climb up the front of the building towards the light - and helpfully cover old wire mesh - towards the cross on the roof.



We have a small church community garden working group that meets every few months on a Saturday morning to weed, water, plant and prune.

This builds relationships within the Church and between people who worship in different services, sometimes meeting and exchanging names for the first time. The garden builds relationships.

We also intentionally seek to talk to people passing by on the busy footpath. It's easy just to keep your head down and tend the garden.

But this misses the opportunity for mission. If we are bold, the garden allows us to explain why a (Presbyterian!) church has a native garden, and celebrate Jesus as both Creator and Lord.

It is a way of engaging people who do not believe but are interested in gardening, or growing food, or concerned about the climate crisis.

Not everyone wants to engage. I often feel quaint and odd when I get blank looks or ignored when I offer a cheery "hello" while watering or weeding. But now and again someone replies they love the garden, and occasionally shares

some of their story that gives me an opportunity to share about the Lord.

This can be the highlight of my day. Simply being present on the site, facing the footpath, and having some lovely flowers to talk about, has led to some meaningful conversations about Jesus.

The garden makes us look outwards to our local community, rather than just wait for someone to walk inside the building to hear a sermon.

Our to-do list includes placing a sign with relevant Bible verses about God's Creation and Christ, and have a monthly - weekly?! - garden group and outreach ministry.

To date no one has come to a church service, or given their life to Christ, after seeing the garden or talking to church folks who tend it.

But we keep caring for it, speaking to people as they walk by, and praying for those who stop and talk and share often difficult things in their lives. I think we may be the only Christians some people talk to, so we see it as an opportunity to love our neighbour and boldly mention Jesus when we can.

METRO equips future gospel ministers

By Rev Simon Wong

The METRO Committee of PCNSW stands for : Ministry Equipping Training Recruiting Organisation and its vision is to see our local churches train and equip men and women for Gospel ministry.

We aim to do this in three ways: Sponsoring trainees financially, Supporting both trainers and trainees and also sowing a long term vision for being involved in our denomination.

Over recent years we've had METRO trainees go through different pathways: the Christ College Traineeship, Ministry Training Strategy (MTS) and also the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES).

Last year we also supported a trainee at Talua Bible College in Vanuatu.

Our trainees also come from churches across the State - some of which are churches with a history of raising up men and women for paid ministry and others just starting out with their first trainee!

In early January, the Committee attended the G8 MTS Conference to meet with our trainers and trainees going through the MTS pathway.

In May, all of our METRO trainees from all the pathways will be invited to a Christ College Open Day to get a taste of college life and meet each other as potential Bible college classmates in the following years!

It really does bring the Committee great joy to see the ministry of the Gospel being passed along from one generation to the next.



WHSE Spot with Hazel Nisbet



Safety Spot

Zoom WHSE Hour is for anyone interested in improving safety, health and environmental practices in the Presbyterian Church.

The Zoom will be one hour plus 15 minutes for questions. Recorded sessions will be posted at <https://pcnsw.org.au/work-health-and-safety/>

Upcoming topics are:

- **Anaphylaxis e-training for first aid (community)** with ASCIA- Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy. **Thursday April 17** 1pm and 7pm. An online course we will do together. To do this course in your own time and obtain certificate see <https://www.allergy.org.au/patients/anaphylaxis-e-training-first-aid-community>
- **Grief Care** with Joseph Park (Chaplain to Chaplains, Jericho Road) **Thursday May 29** 1pm and 7pm.
- **Learn, Prepare, Respond- Short Course** with Heart of The Nation. **Thursday June 26** 1pm and 7pm. Focus on cardiac arrest, heart attack, CPR, AED and emotional preparedness. An online course we will do together. This will not be recorded. To do this course in your own time and receive a certificate see: <https://www.heartofthenation.com.au/training>
- **Safety Management in our Church Organisations** with Hazel Nisbet. An opportunity to look at legal obligations and best practice, WHS priorities and resources. **Thursday July 31** 1pm and 7pm
- **Creation Care for You and Your Church** with Julia Jardine from A Rocha. **Thursday August 28** 1pm and 7pm

To join Hazel on a scheduled Zoom WHSE Hour meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84964186489?pwd=L2I4ajdQc2huMWVHZDRqbk1RM2pndz09>

Meeting ID: 849 6418 6489
Passcode: 472874

For further information or to discuss WHSE matters contact Hazel at hnisbet@pcnsw.org.au and see WHS guidelines, forms and resources at pcnsw.org.au

Schools



The Scots College offers active learning opportunities while remaining dedicated to the character and care of boys.

Transforming Boys' Lives Through Education

Many are familiar with The Scots College being a distinctive Australian boys' school promoting the lordship of Jesus Christ in all things.

Those who are more closely familiar with its history will recall that it was founded on a Presbyterian understanding of vocation and scholarship - to educate students and leaders who participate in the creative work of God in the world by serving the good of the nation and the world through the 'common weal'.

Reverend John Dunmore Lang, the first Presbyterian minister in the colony of NSW, argued in 1826 that "the ultimate and legitimate

object of all education is the formation of a moral and religious character" in a college whose "system of tuition should be conducted on such principles as may ensure the amelioration of the heart, as well as the improvement of the understanding".

Our Scots education aims to help students acquire knowledge of the truth - of God, society and the world - so they are better prepared to serve in their families and the wider world, to the glory of God and for the welfare of others.

After considerable prayer and close consultation with the College community, the College has just shared its new strategic plan *Brave Hearts Bold Minds: The Character of a Scots Education 2025-2034* marking the beginning of the next chapter of The Scots College journey.

We are proudly established on Christian values that anchor our educational philosophy, providing the moral compass and guiding purpose for all that we do.

Our new strategic plan looks forward with these values at the core, ensuring that every Scots boy benefits from an education that is about more than academic achievement - it is about learning, leading and serving with integrity.

Our previous strategic plan, often summarised as 'Reinventing Education', laid a solid foundation for this new chapter. We successfully brought to life transformative educational programs, initiated major infrastructure projects, and established new ways of learning that are more aligned with the real needs of our students and families. The new campuses and buildings are in place and the innovations in educational programs have been piloted and refined.

Now, we look towards the future - to put this preparation into action, executing our vision with consistency and excellence. This strategic plan takes the best of what we have built and makes it even better.

Our commitment is to provide the finest preparation for life, tailored to every boy, through high-quality, high-performance academics, in a culture that caters for a diversity of boys, with strong links to post-school pathways for success.

We will continue to reinvent education, ensuring it meets the evolving challenges of today and tomorrow and is a place where every student is known as an individual, empowered in his strengths and supported in his needs.

Most importantly, we do this in partnership with parents while retaining and building a deeper sense of community - a community that nurtures every student, guided by our Christian faith and shared values.

This journey is exciting, but we are realistic enough to recognise that, at times, maintaining momentum will be difficult.

However, we are acutely aware that it represents our promise to every family. It is the promise of an education that places Christian character at its core, that inspires excellence, and that prepares young men for life.



**“
We will continue to reinvent education, ensuring it meets the evolving challenges of today and tomorrow**”

Chris Balzer now with Christ

The Rev Christie Balzer, went to be with Christ on Friday 24 of January after a short battle with cancer. Chris and his late wife Leah, served at the Talua Theological Training Institute in Vanuatu from 2003 to 2004.

Prior to Talua, Chris taught at the Sydney Presbyterian Theological Centre for many years. He was passionately committed to the truth of the gospel and its spread. After the seismic events associated with the 1977 disruption to the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Chris poured his energy into playing his part in the recovery of the Bible within the Presbyterian Church.

Chris once wrote an article about the resurrection of believers and said:

“If we really believed that only those who trust in Christ for their salvation will go to be with him after they die, then we’d be more involved in missionary work abroad. More of us would go ourselves, and more of us would financially support those who do go.

It was for this reason that, in the late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, thousands of Europeans left the comparative comfort and safety of their homes to preach the gospel in far away places, knowing that many of them would die there and never see their loved ones in Europe again. The men knew that many of their wives would die on the mission field. The women knew that they would bury many of their children there.”

Praise God for Christ’s resurrection!

RESTING: The late Rev Christie Balzer and his late wife Leah, who served in the Church for many years. PHOTO: Contributed.



An investment for eternity

“My word ... goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Is 55:11)

God’s word never fails. It’s the investment that lasts for eternity. We ask that you consider leaving a gift to APWM National Committee in your will to help us continue to declare God’s word throughout the world. Please note this is for the National Committee, not the APWM Victoria Committee.

You might like to consider giving:

- a percentage of your estate to APWM
- a specific amount to APWM
- a piece of property to APWM

Please provide this wording to your Solicitor when seeking advice and assistance in drawing up your will.

“I give to The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (AUSTRALIA) PROPERTY TRUST for the Australian Presbyterian World Mission National Committee (intended amount), (description of property/item) free of testamentary charges and duties for its general purposes and I declare that the receipt of the Secretary of the Trust shall be sufficient discharge to my Executors.”

Giving to APWM for its general purposes allows APWM to best respond to the needs of the time. If you need any help with this then please contact us on (02) 8073 7490 or email us at national@apwm.org.au.

Contact

Australian Presbyterian World Mission
1 Clarence St Burwood NSW 2134
national@apwm.org.au
Phone: (02) 8073 7490
www.apwm.org.au
facebook.com/AustralianPresbyterianWorldMission

Your investment in souls in Malawi

We praise God that, at the time of writing, \$140,000 has been donated for APWM's Malawi (Chichewa) Bible project and 5500 Bibles have been ordered. Over the last few months, the team from Victoria who will be traveling to Malawi in June, have been undergoing training. [Please note that team members are travelling at their own expense].

Team Leader, the Rev John Wilson from Victoria says: "Over the next two or three mission trips, over 5,500 people from the poorest Malawian villages will be blessed as they read God's Word. For many of these dear Christians, they have never had their own copy of God's Word.

In their family units, small groups and churches, they will be able to read God's Word in their own language and grow in their knowledge of Christ. Thank you for your investment in souls in Malawi. As the members of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, you have raised the standard high, and you've purposed to bless the hearts of over 5500 of Malawi's poorest with the eternal blessing of the Word of God."

Please note: The appeal was closed on February 28. Any donation for Bibles for Malawi received after the closing date will be gratefully received and will be used for unforeseen Chichewa Bible distribution needs. Any remaining funds will then be placed in APWM's General Funds to be used for Partner Church causes as decided by the APWM National Committee.



What does it take to distribute Bibles?

What is involved in distributing Bibles in Malawi? Team Leader, the Rev John Wilson explains:

We have a Presbyterian Church of Victoria-based team preparing to go to Malawi from the 24th of June to July 19 this year. The team will give three full weeks to distribute Bibles in villages and to train local Christians in the use of their new Bibles. I'm so grateful to God for gathering together 16 talented members (each self-funded) from nine different Victorian congregations (aged from 20 to 80, 11 men and five women). The training and preparation to go is a six-month commitment. When we arrive in Malawi we'll divide into four groups and, by visiting 2 villages each week, we might be able to distribute 2000 Bible packages (leaving another 2,000 in the shed).

I already have one expression of interest to form a second mission team planned for June - July 2026.

If the Bibles Appeal continues to flourish, then we'll probably need a third team for 2027. Who will come with me?

I mentioned six months training and preparation. This means:

- Practicing how to meet and greet one another in Chichewa;
- Learning how to use and teach the COMA method of Bible study;
- Learning how to teach the Bible story overview in small groups;
- Honing what is in our skill-set and giftedness in terms of singing, reading Scripture, children and youth ministry, preaching and women's ministry.

APWM NSW

Working as a missionary in a secure location: job loss, persecution, beatings and possible death

Many of APWM mission partners work in secure locations.

These are countries where the government is opposed to Christian ministry and/or the major religions in these lands are mostly hostile to Christianity.

These locations are not publicized, names of mission partners are not mentioned nor are the agencies that send them.

Newsletters have masked terms and speak of people and places with pseudo names.

The means by which these countries can be entered are varied. For some it is teaching English, running a business or being involved in medical work. Recently I met a young man who had gained a visa to enter a secure location as a sports coach.

In the next few issues of the Pulse, we will introduce you to some of these people and the opportunities that avail to present the Good

News through a number of avenues and by a number of different visa types. Let's hear from one. Remember name and country will not be published.

"But why are you there if you can't talk about Jesus?"

This, or variations on this, is one of the more commonly asked questions when I share about the work I'm doing.

When I'm in Australia I don't name the exact place I live, and I habitually avoid using the words like "missionary" or "evangelism" that would fit people's conventional understanding of "mission". The reality is that I talk about Jesus all the time. In many ways it's easier to talk about him here, among my deeply religious friends, than in Australia where most people don't think about spiritual matters.

While it is illegal for me to proselytize, I live in a world of birth religions (everyone inherits the family religion from birth). Because of how I look and where I'm from, no one is surprised that I'm a Christian - they'd be more surprised if I wasn't. So, I talk about my own relationship with God openly whenever it's appropriate.

People ask me questions about what I believe. I tell Bible stories as a natural part of conversation. I ask my friends if I can pray for them in the name of Jesus and I do it out loud, on the spot (I've only ever once had someone tell me that they didn't want me to pray for them).

We invite our friends to celebrate our holidays (Christmas and Easter) with us and share the stories with them during our celebrations. I also love that I live in a country where I have to have a visible job, a reason for being here. I'm fortunate enough to be doing work that genuinely helps people, that shows love of neighbour in really practical ways. But even if I didn't, the fact that people know I'm a Christian and then get to see how I work - how I make decisions, how I interact with staff and beneficiaries and the community - is a witness to who I am in Christ. And this leads to the other reason I am

uncomfortable using the word "missionary" about myself.

Yes, I moved across the world. And that has its unique joys and challenges. But in many ways, I do the thing I hope we are all doing, living intentionally as light in a dark world, being ready at all times to give an answer for the hope that I have. Loving my neighbour in word and deed. Being here has made me quicker to pray for opportunities to speak and quicker to see the opportunities when they come, yet these are things we can all grow in if we just keep encouraging one another to live intentionally in all our relationships.

Having said all of that, I do need to acknowledge some things that are very different here. If the government was to decide that I was actively proselytizing I would be expelled from the country.

My colleague has been called in to talk to the secret police twice in the past year. And those who come to faith face job loss, persecution and beatings by family and acquaintances, even death. They know what it costs to follow the King.

And they know it's worth it. But it's hard for us to see and it's hard for them to persevere. Pray for them, please.

Faith and family: A conversation with Dave Hayes from Albury



From his early years of growing up in a Christian home to becoming a minister, discipling kids, youth, and families, Rev Dave Hayes shares a story of intentionality, partnership, and a deep passion for helping others follow Jesus.

Whether he's praying with his children, supporting a single parent, or fostering Gospel partnerships within his church, Dave embodies the importance of relational discipleship and working together to raise the next generation in Christ.

Based in the growing region of Albury-Wodonga, where New South Wales meets Victoria, Dave is part of a network of churches called Albury Presbyterian Churches working to plant new congregations and reach the community with the gospel.

For Dave, ministry is a family affair and a team effort, involving his own kids, his church family, and a commitment to equipping others.

How did you become a Christian?

I had the blessing of growing up in a family that loved Jesus and taught me the Bible. I can't remember a time when I didn't know about Jesus

. Around Year 8, when I was 13 or 14, I started reading the Bible for myself and realised I'd always identified as a Christian without really considering what that meant.

It became real for me when I understood serving Jesus meant more than outward behaviour; it was about my heart and life.

By Year 12, I was deeply convicted of my sin and committed to living for Jesus. Those years were pivotal in shaping my faith.

What is the context of Albury like for ministry?

Albury, together with Wodonga just across the river in Victoria, forms a mission field of about 100,000 people. Our network includes four churches, and we desire to keep church planting on our agenda. It's a growing region with lots of potential for gospel work.

Albury has many multigenerational families in our churches, with grandparents, parents, and kids often attending together. This creates stability and strong ties, so we see fewer young people moving away permanently. A few years ago, we started a kids' club because we noticed a baby boom and wanted to be strategic about engaging families as those kids grew up. It's a great place for relational ministry because of the strong family connections.

What was discipleship from your parents like growing up?

My parents were intentional about ensuring we attended Bible-believing churches and were involved in kids' clubs and youth groups. My dad always answered our questions from the Bible, and I vividly remember him patiently reading Scripture when there were Jehovah's Witnesses at our door.

How do you approach discipleship with your own children?

We try to pray with our kids daily, often at dinner or during school drop-offs. When they were younger, we read kids' Bibles with them, and as they grew older, we used age-appropriate devotionals from The Good Book Company. Now, we incentivise their Bible reading with little rewards like lollies.

I'm mindful of making church enjoyable for them, so they grow up loving it, not resenting it. We involve them in ministry but ensure they understand why we do it and that they're willing participants. Dinner conversations are also vital; they provide opportunities to ask questions and reflect on faith in a natural way.

Why is it important for churches to focus on partnering with parents?

The Bible's commands to make disciples and grow in Christ are for the whole church, not just specific age groups. Paul's instructions to children in the pastoral epistles assume they're present in gatherings. Following Jesus' example of welcoming children means we must integrate kids into church life and invest in their spiritual growth. Partnering with parents helps ensure discipleship isn't outsourced but embraced as a communal effort.

How do you encourage kids and youth leaders to partner with parents?

At our church, we emphasise that kids' and youth ministry is all about partnering with parents in discipling their children. During services, we use a 'gospel partnership' slide when kids go out, reminding everyone that this is a shared responsibility.

Family spots in church services align with the kids' church lessons so parents know what their children are learning and can follow up.

We also encourage a 'five to one model'—each child having five Christian adults invested in their faith—to foster relationships that support long-term discipleship.

How do organisations like PYNOW support this partnership?

PYNOW provides valuable resources and connections, making ministry feel less isolated. Knowing there's a state-level body that can point you to resources or experienced leaders is a huge help.

It's also encouraging to see partnerships forming between churches and individuals working together to disciple the next generation.

Any encouragements or stories from partnering with parents in your church?

One story that stands out is a single mum and her daughter in our church.

The dad passed away years ago, and they've been on their own for a long time.

I've watched the daughter grow from primary school to now thriving in youth group. Her mum shared how much she loves youth group because her daughter talks about Jesus the whole way home. Recently, the daughter took initiative to make a plan for how she could go to a Christian camp, even figuring out how to help pay for it.

It's been incredible to see her grow in faith and encourage her mum in the process.

Dave, and the ministry in Albury is just one example of how important intentional discipleship is, both in families and churches.

His experiences remind us that ministry to children and youth is a partnership—one that nurtures faith through relationships, community, and a shared commitment to making Jesus known.

If you'd like to receive a free video course from PYNOW on Family Discipleship via email, fill in this form: <https://pynow.org.au/resources/>

Growing in faith and Christian leadership: Lara's Lead for Life internship



Lara, introduce yourself to us! What's important for people to know about you?

Hi! I'm Lara, a 19-year-old design student at Western Sydney University, currently in my second year of a Bachelor of Design in Visual Communications. Alongside my studies, I work as a swim teacher.

As the eldest of four siblings, I enjoy being part of a close-knit family with three younger brothers who are growing up fast.

I've been blessed to grow up in a Christian household, and my church family at Hope at the Hill Rooty Hill Presbyterian Church has always been a safe and supportive space for me. My faith journey began early, but growing up in a public school environment brought unique challenges.

While I had great friends, there were moments when I felt alone and struggled to live out my faith, especially when it made me stand out. These experiences tested my faith, but they also deepened it.

Through those struggles, I've come to know and trust in God's unchanging love. I've learned that I am accepted by Him—not because of anything I've done, but because of His grace.

This assurance has taught me that belonging to God is far more valuable than seeking approval from the world.

You're about to wrap up your Lead for Life internship. How would you explain Lead for Life to someone who is unfamiliar with it?

Lead for Life (L4L) is an internship program that equips young Christians with the tools to grow as leaders grounded in God's Word.

It's an incredible opportunity to learn from the ultimate example of leadership: Jesus.

Through a week of training at PY Summer Camp, reflection, and practical exercises, we gain insights into understanding the Bible, teaching it to others, and serving with love and humility. The ultimate goal of L4L is to grow as followers of Jesus and to lead others in doing the same.

One of the highlights of L4L is the PY Summer Camp experience. During the week, we dive into devotions, worship God together, and discuss Bible talks in small groups. We also get hands-on practice in leadership by preparing and running activities, including a big New Year's Eve session for the camp.

Sharing testimonies was another deeply impactful part of the week. Hearing my friends' stories of faith—their struggles, growth, and turning points—was both emotional and inspiring. It deepened our friendships and reminded me of God's work in all of our lives.

Sounds awesome! But L4L doesn't stop after PY Summer Camp, does it? What happens next? What was it like for you?

We get partnered with a mentor from our local church. My mentor encouraged me and supported me in the ministry I began volunteering in at church. This mentoring relationship has been invaluable in helping me grow as a leader and in my walk with God.

My church doesn't have a youth group, so after camp, I felt inspired to start a Girls' Growth Group. We meet once a term for afternoon tea, where we share a love of crafting—drawing, knitting, crocheting—while studying the Bible together. It's been a wonderful way to apply what I've learned about leadership.

Why have you loved the L4L internship?

L4L has been life-changing in so many ways. It's fun and engaging, with plenty of opportunities to connect with others—whether through preparing skits, running games, or simply spending time with friends.

It's also a great time to reflect and mature in faith. L4L creates a safe space to slow down, spend time with God, and set goals for the future.

Before L4L, I felt stagnant in my faith. The intensive at PY Summer Camp reignited my love for God's Word and reminded me of the joy and energy that comes from spending time with Him.

Since then, I've started keeping a prayer journal and prioritising quiet time with God each morning. Looking back on answered prayers has been a beautiful reminder of His faithfulness.

L4L has also encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone—whether by starting conversations with non-Christian friends, helping out with SRE, or initiating deeper connections with kids at church.

Knowing that God is at work in others' hearts gives me confidence to share His truth.

What would you say to someone considering signing up for L4L?

If you're a young Christian looking to grow in faith and leadership, I can't recommend L4L enough. It equips you with skills to serve in ministry while giving you a safe space to reflect, connect, and mature.

The friendships you build during L4L are long-lasting, and the lessons you learn will shape your walk with Christ for years to come.

L4L provides a firm foundation for Christian leadership. Through L4L, I've learned to listen more, slow down, and draw near to God. It's been an incredible experience, and I'm excited to see how God continues to use me for His glory.

More information about Lead for Life: <https://pynsw.org.au/lead-for-life/>

John releases book for “the darkest of times”

By Karen Forman



AUTHOR: Newcastle's John O'Callaghan has produced a coffee table book based on his own experiences hoping to help other people going through dark times. **PHOTO:** Contributed.

Where do we go in the darkest of times? What do we do when we feel no one understands us, and we have no hope?

Newcastle's John O'Callaghan has endeavoured to answer those questions with his newly released book, *The Doors of the Ocean*, subtitled, *Hope for The Hurting*.

John, a former school teacher and retired chaplain who lives with his midwife wife Kathryn in Newcastle and attends Charlestown Presbyterian Church, released the high-quality book in November 2024. It is now available at the Reformers bookshop.

His goal in creating the book was to “make something timeless, beautiful and atmospheric, something different to the kind of book you usually pick up in the Christian bookstores”.

“It is aimed at people who have suffered seriously and those people who are caring for and loving those people and that is what makes it a beautiful book to give to someone,” he said.

John grew up in the Roman Catholic Church, almost joined the clergy at 20, then had a massive conversion.

“Newcastle has become an utterly hypo secular town that has rejected religion outright because of what the Catholic and High Anglican churches did here,” he said.

“All these people who rolled up in the media, I knew them.

“Part of the origins of the book was thinking about implications and ramifications of having grown up in this town and having all of this happen.” John said he had had experiences with grief himself and based some of his book on those, along with times doing pastoral care work at home, with his wife.

“People say, ‘you must be proud,’” he said.

“But for me it was a great burden of responsibility I carried. I never really planned to write a book on suffering even though I had read so much about it. “I was feeling the weight of getting this as good as possible and writing in a way that can be revisited many times.

“A lot of people are lost, inside suffering, so alone and often so abandoned. I had to be weighing up in the balancing of the artistic side, but also the respecting human suffering depth and on the other hand, the need to actually write about what the Bible is actually really saying and not saying about suffering.

“It is in a reflective contemplative tradition, the marriage of art and theology.”

John said the art was the photography and his poetry, but then there were scriptures throughout, three short stories and prose pieces which were reflections on the nature of suffering.

“It was very expensive to make, we poured three years into it, along with my brilliant young designer Emily Lee. The book is high-end production, sewn binding, hard cover with quality paper.

“All of the photos for the book were taken at Redhead Beach, near the couple’s home, by Stuart Scott, who also attends the same church.”

It is a second book for John, *After Darkness, Light*, which was published in 2008.

“I had a lot of poems and decided to get together with Stuart and make *After Darkness, Light*, which was black and white photography and poetry,” he said.

“This book is very different, a book about suffering.

“I have done a lot of reading on Christian philosophy and worked with a lot of people in pastoral care.

“This book is what am I going to say to them about God, about life, about suffering, if I had my chance, that’s what this book is.”

Daughter Hannah is also a midwife in Sydney and Grace is an occupational therapist also in Sydney.

New PCNSW camping guidelines help run safe, effective youth camps

By Akos Balogh CPU Resource and Training Manager

CHILDREN’S and youth camps change lives.

They help young people grow in faith, build friendships, and make cherished memories.

Many older Christians look back on camps they attended in their younger years as pivotal to accepting Jesus as Lord.

For this reason, camps have both an immediate and eternal impact.

While there is much joy in running a camp, they also bring serious responsibilities.

Without proper planning, issues like bullying, neglect, medical emergencies, or abuse can cause serious harm and even lead children away from the faith.

That’s why following the *Breaking the Silence* (BTS) Manual regarding camps for children and young people (Section 16) is essential.

The new PCNSW Camping Guidelines will help you implement Section 16 of the BTS Manual for your children’s and youth camps.

The Guidelines also contain best practices for organising such camps, as the Guidelines aim to be a ‘one-stop-shop’ and step-by-step document for your camping prep. From outlining what you should look for in camp accommodation to camper-leader ratios, the Guidelines embed child safety practices for key aspects of organising and running a camp.

It will remind you of easy-to-forget requirements such as the need for consent before taking photos of campers. These things can be overlooked in the busyness of camp preparation and camp life.

The Camp Guidelines also refer you to relevant policies and resources, whether it be camping WHS webinars or other parts of the BTS Manual.

It gives you links to risk assessments for activities, ensuring everything from swimming to evening events is safe and well-planned.

Why does such planning matter?

A well-planned, well-run camp protects everyone—campers, leaders, and the church itself.

By following the Camp Guidelines, you’re not just meeting legal requirements. You’re creating a space where children and youth can thrive, knowing they are cared for and free to engage with God through His word.

Ready to plan your next camp? Visit breakingthesilence.org.au/resources to find the Camping Guidelines. A well-planned, safe camp is a way to honour God and those he has placed in your care.



Conduct Protocol Unit
Presbyterian Church of Australia in NSW/ACT



Guidance in the Christian Life

By Rev Dr Peter Barnes



How does God guide His people?

We can sing: Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, / Pilgrim through this barren land.

God guides, yes (see Ps.48:14), but how does God guide His people?

Pagans have examined lizard entrails, snake skins, the bones of owls, ouija boards, horoscopes, tea leaves, and the like.

One believes what one believes. How do you feel when people say to you: 'The Lord led me to go here and there, and do this and that'?

Are those people super-spiritual?

RC Sproul tells how five friends of his in five different American cities all told him of jobs that were suitable for him, and each said that he was sure that it was God's will for Sproul to take that job.

Now, obviously they could not all be right. God has revealed some things, and other things are secret (Deut.29:29).

What we have in the Bible is what God has revealed. What we do not have in the Bible, we cannot be sure about. Understand that and you are halfway to saving yourself a lot of heartache and a lot of fruitless searching.

Let us begin with some negative points:

- 1. Apostolic guidance is not the same as guidance for most Christians.** Paul was led by a vision (Acts 16:8-10). If that happens once in your lifetime, be surprised and give thanks. It is exceptional.
- 2. Beware of reading the Bible in a way that it is not meant to be read.** John Wesley used to cast lots and open his Bible anywhere. He cast lots before he decided to preach against the doctrine of predestination. He got that wrong! Campbell Morgan tells the story of the man who wanted to know God's will for his life, so he flipped open his Bible.

The first verse he read was 'Judas went out and hanged himself.'

That did not appeal much, so he flipped over quite a few pages to Jesus' words uttered after he had spoken the parable of the good Samaritan: 'Go and do likewise.'

'He gulped at that, and so tried again. This time he came to John 13:27, 'What you do, do quickly.'

The point is, it is a bizarre method.

God may occasionally bless it, but it is not recommended.

Edith Schaeffer tells how she flipped open Isaiah 2:2. She took this as a confirmation of the Schaeffers' desire to build L'Abri ('The Shelter') in the Swiss Alps.

Again, God may occasionally bless this method, but it is hardly the usual method of obtaining guidance.

- 3. We can rely on circumstances and providences.** However, circumstances are difficult to read. If you want to go to India as a missionary, and you cannot get a visa, but a job crops up in Thailand, is God testing your desire to go to India or is He leading you to Thailand? You cannot be 100% sure, and you have to live with that.

At first, Amy Carmichael thought that she would be a missionary to Ceylon, then it was China, then Japan, and finally in November 1895, she made her way to India, the scene of her life's work.

David Livingstone originally thought that he would be heading for China, before he ended up in Africa. It is as John Henry Newman put it: Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see/ The distant scene; one step enough for me.

4. We can ask for signs, or 'put out the fleece' as Gideon did in Judges 6. God gave Gideon His Word (Judges 6:16), but Gideon wanted confirmation by the fleece (Judge 6:36-40). God was gracious to Gideon and gave him his signs, but it comes close to tempting God.

Calvin comments: 'Where God has closed His holy mouth, I will desist from enquiry.' We must be subject to Scripture; we should pray; we can ask advice (Prov.12:15); and we must cultivate a godly attitude.

It may help to look at two examples of non-moral acts, not covered by specific biblical commands:

Eating meat offered to idols first. This is tailor-made for guidance. A pagan invites you to dinner. The meat will have been offered first to idols. Do you go? (1 Cor.10:27) It is up to you. Ask for more, and you are asking for more than Scripture gives. One Christian might accept, and another refuse. The only thing Paul says is seek the glory of God, and do not give needless offence (1 Cor.10:31-32).

David wanted to build a temple to God. That was good but David did not build it (2 Chron.6:8-9). David was inside the revealed will of God but outside the secret will of God. Today too much evangelical and charismatic thinking on guidance tries to get at the secret will of God. It claims to know what God has not revealed.

On issues like whom to marry, what job to take up, and where to live, James chastises those who plan their lives without God or claim to know what they cannot know (James 4:13-15). All you can say is 'I think God is leading me in this direction.'

Tim Keller comments truly on this: 'Modern people want a technique for guidance, "five steps to good decisions."

God offers wise character, hard won over a lifetime.'

