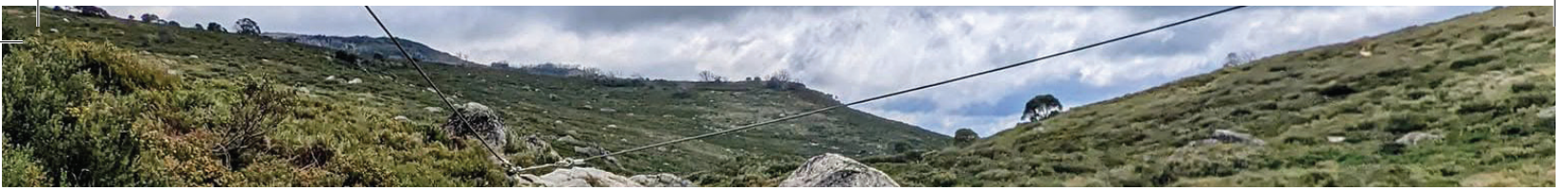


# the pulse

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**Facebook:** Presbyterian Church of Australia in New South Wales

**PUBLISHER:** The Presbyterian Church (New South Wales) Property Trust

**EDITOR IN CHIEF:** Jeffrey Falls | [jfalls@pcnsww.org.au](mailto:jfalls@pcnsww.org.au)

**EDITOR/JOURNALIST:** Karen Forman | 0425 675 555 | [kforman@pcnsww.org.au](mailto:kforman@pcnsww.org.au)

**CIRCULATION MANAGER:** Lara Rutledge | +61 2 9690 9385 | [lrutledge@pcnsww.org.au](mailto:lrutledge@pcnsww.org.au)

**PROOF READER:** Betty Thompson

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**STATE MODERATOR:** Mr David King

**GENERAL MANAGER:** Jeffrey Falls

168 Chalmers St, Surry Hills NSW 2010  
PO Box 2196, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

**Phone:** 1300 773 774

**Email:** [general@pcnsww.org.au](mailto:general@pcnsww.org.au)

**Web:** [www.pcnsww.org.au](http://www.pcnsww.org.au)

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**MAGAZINE DESIGNER:** Hello Church Graphic Design

**COVER :** A bridge over the Snowy River in NSW on a cool Autumn day represents the metaphorical bridge between the seasons of Summer and Winter; a time, according to the Bible, of contemplation and learning to trust that like the leaves on the trees, God will honour His promises for continuing life.

**PHOTO:** Karen Forman





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## Welcome to Autumn!

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By Karen Forman



Welcome to the Autumn edition of The Presbyterian Pulse - and the first of four seasonal editions for 2026!

What does Autumn mean to you? The dictionary says Autumn is the transitional season between summer and winter, characterized by cooler temperatures, less daylight and a change in the leaves of many trees.

It is a beautiful season that, as the heat of summer is replaced by a coolness in the air, can manifest feelings of excitement for change ahead.

The Bible sees the autumn season as one of blessing, reflection, change, restoration and harvest and features many beautiful verses about it.

For me personally, adjusting to going from full time single mum to part time empty nester as my daughter adjusts to college life, Autumn this year has special significance - not to mention some anxiety. I feel like I need to reinvent myself. Who am I now?

But the Bible has so much hope.

With a bit more time on my hands and to support my daughter's studies, I have taken up driving buses a couple of days a week; the most challenging thing I have ever done.

In just a few weeks I've noticed the trees of Australia's capital city changing as Autumn approaches. They don't look dead and dying. They look beautiful. They are changing colour, they are preparing for change. They represent hope - because after Autumn will come Winter and then Spring, when those same trees will renew, burst with colour and new life. As a poet and developing songwriter, I have been watching people, especially the homeless living on the streets and growing so much as a writer.

Galatians 6:9 says: "Let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up".

Trees cannot be afraid of change, because if they refused to go through the Autumnal process, their cycle of life would be broken. They need to release to receive.

Driving buses scared me at first - mostly because of the huge responsibility of carrying people, not to mention dealing with our busy roads and other drivers. But like the autumnal trees, I need to release my trust and faith in God, so that I can receive all that He has promised me.

If what God has created in nature trusts the Master - then we humans should too. Something to reflect on as those Autumn leaves fall . . .

**Moderator**



## **Part of the ‘winning team’**

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**By David King**

I often get asked how my year as Moderator is going. I have had the pleasure of attending a couple of school speech days. It must be the little bit of Scottish blood in me, but I thought The Scots School Pipes and Drums were magnificent playing on the Opera House forecourt.

I have attended some Presbytery meetings and committee meetings, but the most active part of the role has been to sign off on various documents that in most cases get sent to the Government on behalf of the church, as the Gospel Society and Culture committee and Freedom for Faith (a body of various churches that we are a part of) respond to bits of Government policy debate.

This has made me very much aware that I am representing the Presbyterian Church in NSW/ACT.

Most of the things that I sign I have very little input into, and I thank the various committees for the work they do behind the scenes. I even received a lot of thanks for the letter sent out in response to the events at Bondi at the end of last year.

Again, I wish to thank those who wrote the bulk of this letter.

A few Sundays ago, my own pastor CS Tang was preaching from Matthew 4. He started by referring to the fact that when our favourite national sporting team wins, we often celebrate by saying how we won, even though all we do is sit on the sidelines and cheer on the team. I am a cricket fan and of course my response re the Ashes is that we won 4-1.

My involvement was attending Day 4 of the Sydney Test and following along on TV or the internet for all other days of the series. I have no claim on having any impact at all in the win. If I managed to get to the dressing room door at the SCG after the final test had been won and said we won and that I should be allowed to join in the celebrations with the players, I would be laughed at and chased away by security. The teams we support represent us and we do nothing.

This all reminds me that in Jesus Christ we have the ultimate representative. Because not only does He present us faultless before God, He does so despite us doing nothing to deserve it. We, like sport spectators, also do nothing in being presented before God. Christ does all the work. Christ gave up everything to take our place. God calls us by His grace. We do not do anything. We are already part of the winning team. Let's all go out and gladly share this good news with all we come in contact with.

## Vale Andrew Donald Campbell - Faithful, Honest, and full of Hope...



By Anne Campbell

He was my husband. And he was my best friend, my partner in ministry, and the person with whom I shared a life of faith for 54 years.

Grief after a long marriage isn't loud—it is quiet, heavy, and everywhere at once.

And yet, even in the middle of this—while I miss him, reach for what is no longer there, and feel the weight of silence—I choose where my heart rests: in Christ alone. This is our story... deeply human, grounded, and full of faith that has been tested, not just talked about.

Andrew loved the Gospel of Jesus Christ with his whole heart. He read widely, paid attention to the world as it really is, and worked hard to bring Scripture to life in that world. He used to say that the task was to bring the Word to the world and the world to the Word—always asking how we are to live Christianly in a broken, complicated place. That was not theory for him. It was how he lived. Youth ministry was the joy of his life. Together we took young people—many of them street kids—on beach and bush camps, in a double-decker bus, sleeping in church halls, camping under star-filled skies with no city lights. Some of those kids had never seen the ocean, never stood in the dark bush and looked up at the stars. Andrew believed that wonder, adventure, and truth belonged together. He wanted young people to know that following Jesus was not boring and not for the faint-hearted.

He was a great teacher because he made faith real. Whether in a pulpit, a classroom, around a campfire, or at the kitchen table, he brought Scripture into everyday life. He wanted people to know that the Bible is trustworthy, that Jesus is

real, and that what we believe must shape how we live.

He loved our family deeply. Our home was marked by prayer, the reading of God's Word, and the joy of being together. As a grandfather he was endlessly creative—games, inventions, wild adventures—and yet he always drew us back to what mattered most: prayer, love, and pointing hearts to Christ.

One of Andrew's favourite lines was this:

**“What is, is not what was—and what is, is not what will be.”**

He meant that this broken world is not how God created it, and it is not how it will end. That truth shaped his ministry, his courage, and his hope.

I grieve him. Fifty-four years of shared language, shared habits, shared faith, shared history, and shared ministry—when that is taken suddenly, it leaves a silence no words can fill. Love makes loss hurt. But I am not crushed by grief. I hold sorrow and joy together, because I know where he is.

He is with God now, beyond time, and at peace. What has been taken from me—and from all he served—is real. But I hold onto Christ and his promise of eternal life, which is stronger still.

Andrew never wanted attention on himself. He always pointed to Jesus. If anything of his life remains, I pray it is this: that people would love Christ more deeply, trust God more fully, and live with courage in a world that is not yet what it will be. We have a voice. My Andrew lived for that hope.

And I will go on holding it in Joy.

## Mission partners enjoy a trip around the world

By Elizabeth Brown with Graham Barnes

A TRIP around the world with various mission partners sharing their ministries was a highlight of the APWM NSW's annual mission celebration on December 6.

One partner had arrived back in Sydney two days before for her Home Assignment. Another was returning to his field of service the next day. APWMNSW was grateful for their attendance. Both work in secure locations.

Each partner in attendance was given time to share. First up were Nate and Sami Ho from Campbelltown Presbyterian Church who are preparing to work with a church in Japan. They hope to leave for Japan with their two young daughters in the early part of this year. It was good to hear that their support level is climbing to its target.

Surprisingly they have been able to connect with a Japanese community in Campbelltown. This gave them a sense of belonging and an opportunity to be a witness!

Once in Japan they initially will be in Tokyo coming to grips with the language but also learning to work with a very international team. They will eventually move to Chiba to work in a church there. Both are very conscious of the 125 million people in Japan most of whom have never met a Christian. Also, that the church in Japan has an aging population including the pastors.

They have learnt that becoming a Christian in Japan means losing your identity and being renounced by family. Their vision is to make contacts and to see younger people trained to be pastors. Please stand with them as they make this move to a very different culture.

John and Denise Dickson took us to Thailand

where they have been serving for 23 years mostly in Chiang Mi. Their ministry in the last five years has centred around their community church ArunNakon.

The focus is to train new Christians and to be a witness as a Christian community. Incorporated in this community is the Titus team, a group of dedicated leaders who desire to train others to lead and to establish church plants.

The members of the ArunNakon church make a concerted effort to spend time with non-Christian family members and friends. John and Denise expressed their appreciation of the support from APWM and the Presbyterian Church at Wentworthville.

Peter Burke, who has worked with SIM in Nigeria for over 21 years has announced his retirement. He will put his hand to other aspects of the mission in Nigeria.

Though now based in Australia he keeps returning to what he calls behind the scenes ministry. He no longer has management roles or executive roles but sees himself as a mentor and advisor. He has a good understanding of the complexities of Nigeria with a population of 236 million in a land space approximately the size of NSW.

Sixty percent of the population is Muslim, 35 per cent Christian the five per cent "whatever".

There are 255 known languages and 55 dialects. An estimated 3500 Christians are killed each year. There are a lot of pressure points in the country that often erupt. Some because of religion, land issues or because of herders wanting fodder for their animals. Those who come to Christ must have a deep understanding of forgiveness. Peter has mentioned that "Yes, God uses even accountants on

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the mission field. Rowan served in South Asia for 18 years with Interserve.

Now he is based in Australia, still with Interserve, and fulfils requests from Christian organisations for photographic and video work.

In 2025 he worked in SE Asia country with Project Video, training people from several Asian countries in the use of DSLR cameras to produce Christian media in local languages.

Moving to a village, he was involved in making a documentary on how the gospel first came there in the 1950s. Rowan acted as the first missionary to enter the village, riding on an elephant! In the village he was surprised to be served Starbucks coffee, as the beans are grown locally and sold to Starbucks.

Later in 2025 Rowan spent time in another SE Asian country. He accompanied a Project Video group on a trek and they visited a Tibetan refugee camp where a church had been established to try and break the hard core of Buddhism.

Then they called on four organisations that Project Video assists by providing equipment and training to make local language Christian media. He also took photos at a Verandah School for poor children and during a comprehensive leprosy program that was supported by INF Australia.

The guest speaker was Rob Falls who first shared of his family's ministry at the Talua Theological College in Vanuatu through a family video.

Rob as Academic Dean and El as nurse/midwife shared further of their strategic ministry training pastors reminding us that Vanuatu consists of 83 islands and Talua is the only accredited college in the country. It trains one third of the pastors in churches throughout Vanuatu. One noticeable advance in Vanuatu is that of other religions

including Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and Seventh day Adventists. These come with attractive offers of money and resources. Of course, these offers are very attractive to the people of Vanuatu. Pray they will not be deceived.

Rob introduced Daniel Craig from Beecroft Presbyterian Church who has spent the last two years as a ministry apprentice (Metro Program) at Talua. Daniel shared of his experiences at Talua and recommended this opportunity to other young people interested in a cross-cultural experience.

Rob shared from Luke 14 mentioning some cultural struggles evident with the Vanuatu people. They jostle for places of honour and for the security of success. One student shared with Rob that he came to college to gain the title of pastor.

I think we all know that this is an issue of the human heart anywhere! Rob also mentioned that the people love legalism and this is something that they have to work through when they come to Christ. Uphold the Falls' as they return to Vanuatu with their family after their Home Assignment.

Stephen was able to share of his long-term ministry with Wycliffe Bible Translators and reminded us that in the difficulties nothing is too hard for God.

He also acknowledged that many of the difficulties he has experienced in his work have been overcome with prayer. (Keep praying.) He entreated all present to give glory and thanks to God for the translation work.

**Listening to each of the speakers reinforced that the gospel is universal in its call and the most urgent need of our world. Thank God that His truth transcends every nation, culture, language group and individual. Let our churches be faithful in prayer for the missionaries who share Christ across the nations of the world. Let there be raised up more people with a burden for Christ and other people and to serve Him in other places.**

# A Program That Changes Them: Inside PLC Armidale's Transformative Outdoor Education Journey

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At PLC Armidale, outdoor education is not a standalone activity but a purposeful sequence of transformative experiences designed to support girls in the process of becoming.

The College's bespoke Explore • Serve • Journey (ESJ) program weaves together Outdoor Education, Service Learning and Pastoral Care—creating what College Principal Nicola Taylor describes as “a framework that helps girls grow into young women of character.”

While ESJ experiences span Kindergarten to Year 12, the most significant transformations occur in the middle years, a stage Mrs Taylor calls “a particularly challenging period for identity, friendships and change.”

The programs in Years 9, 10 and 11 are intentionally designed as Rite of Passage experiences—helping girls navigate this transition with resilience, self-awareness and faith.

The centrepiece is the Year 9, 28-day residential program, a month-long adventure in which students travel through remote environments by bike, canoe and on foot, spending 12 nights in tents.

Girls learn to navigate, work as a team and problem-solve under real conditions. The journey culminates in an overnight solo reflection—an experience many describe as life-shaping.

Outdoor Education Specialist Amanda Burney says these extended journeys create space for genuine transformation.

“When girls leave behind technology and everyday routine, something shifts. A change in landscape becomes a change in mind-scape. They rethink assumptions, face fears, and discover strengths they didn't know they had.”

These shared challenges forge deep cohort connections. “The memories and stories become glue,” Ms Burney says. “They bind a year group together for years to come.”

In Year 10, the ESJ program widens its scope with a 13-day journey from Australia's highest city, Armidale, to Sydney, Canberra and finally to Australia's highest mountain - Mt Kosciuszko. For many regional students, it is their first sustained experience of Australia's major cities. Service plays a central role, with girls volunteering at not-for-profit organisations supporting vulnerable communities in Sydney.

“This is faith in action,” College Chaplain Jen Leahy said. “Service broadens the girls' worldview and helps them understand their capacity to make a difference.”

The final days in Thredbo combine challenge and awe—summitting Mt Kosciuszko, riding the Thredbo Valley Trail and exploring the alpine environment.

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Year 11's Rock and Rope program takes students to the Blue Mountains for six days of abseiling, climbing and high-exposure traversing. Trust, teamwork and courage sit at the centre of the experience.

Across all three programs, spiritual growth remains a constant thread. The girls experience the evidence of God through this world and in this world. Ms Burney also notes the biblical significance of wilderness:

"In scripture, the wilderness is where people encounter God and experience transformation. We see that echoed in our students—the awe of the landscape opens them to deeper reflection and a sense of something greater."

What ultimately defines ESJ is the expectation that no girl returns the same. Whether it's a shift in perspective, a new appreciation for others or a profound change in how they see themselves, each experience nudges them forward on their journey.

As Mrs Taylor puts it, "Explore, Serve, Journey helps our girls understand who they are, who they are becoming—and who God would have them be."

Micah 6:8 "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



## Safety Spot

# Safety guidelines, forms and videos available

By Hazel Nisbet

Have you looked at the updated WHS Guidelines for our Church Organisations (November 2025) on our church web page?

This can be found at [pcnsw.org.au](https://pcnsw.org.au) under Resources - Work Health and Safety (<https://pcnsw.org.au/work-health-and-safety/>).

The website also has forms and templates, including WHS policy and 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 eg working bees, preschool and children's ministry activities, youth camp, short term mission.

WHS video recordings of monthly WHSE Zoom Hour are also available on the website.

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.



Psychosocial eg mental health related incidents are more appropriately discussed and followed up by Session at Elders and Deacons meetings.

Our regulator, SafeWork NSW also provides information, codes of practice and useful templates for managing work health and safety at church and associated ministries.

See [safework.nsw.gov.au](https://safework.nsw.gov.au) (eg Easy to do WHS toolkit).

WHS management can seem daunting, especially for small congregations but can be managed 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**

## Retired pastor Peter leads pilgrimage on Paul's turf

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### *Preamble*

***What do a pastor and his wife do in retirement? If they are Peter and Sue Currie, they lead a tour group following Paul's Footsteps in Greece and Türkiye -Paul's Second Missionary Journey.***

By Warwick Bradley

After being part of a tour group to Israel and Jordan, retired Woonona Presbyterian Community Church pastor Peter Currie and his wife Sue decided to lead a group of 40 on a 16-day tour to Greece and Türkiye.

This special pilgrimage, which included a significant number from Peter's church at Woonona, as well as many who travelled previously with Peter and Sue, would essentially follow the apostle Paul's second missionary journey, but in reverse.

There were many highlights including a three-night cruise around some of the Greeks Islands, including, Patmos, Mykonos, Crete and Santorini, as well as visiting Istanbul where we were able to go inside a number of mosques, check out the Grand Bazaar and tour parts of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Along the way, special devotions were led by Peter at significant places including Patmos, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus and the site of the first Christian baptism.

Also included in our journey were Thessaloniki, Pergamon, Delphi and Troy.

The scenery around Meterora was incredible with only six surviving monasteries perched high on rocky outcrops overlooking a deep valley.

The underground cisterns in Istanbul, The Topkapi Palace, as well as the number of mosques including the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia were also amazing.

The Hagia Sophia was once a Christian church before being a mosque and yet still retaining Christian based mosaics.

What a privilege to be part of this tour group which gave all of us a wonderful understanding of the scriptures, bringing us closer to each other and to our loving God, while deeply understanding the incredible missionary zeal of Paul.

***Warwick Bradley is an Elder at Woonona Presbyterian Community Church***



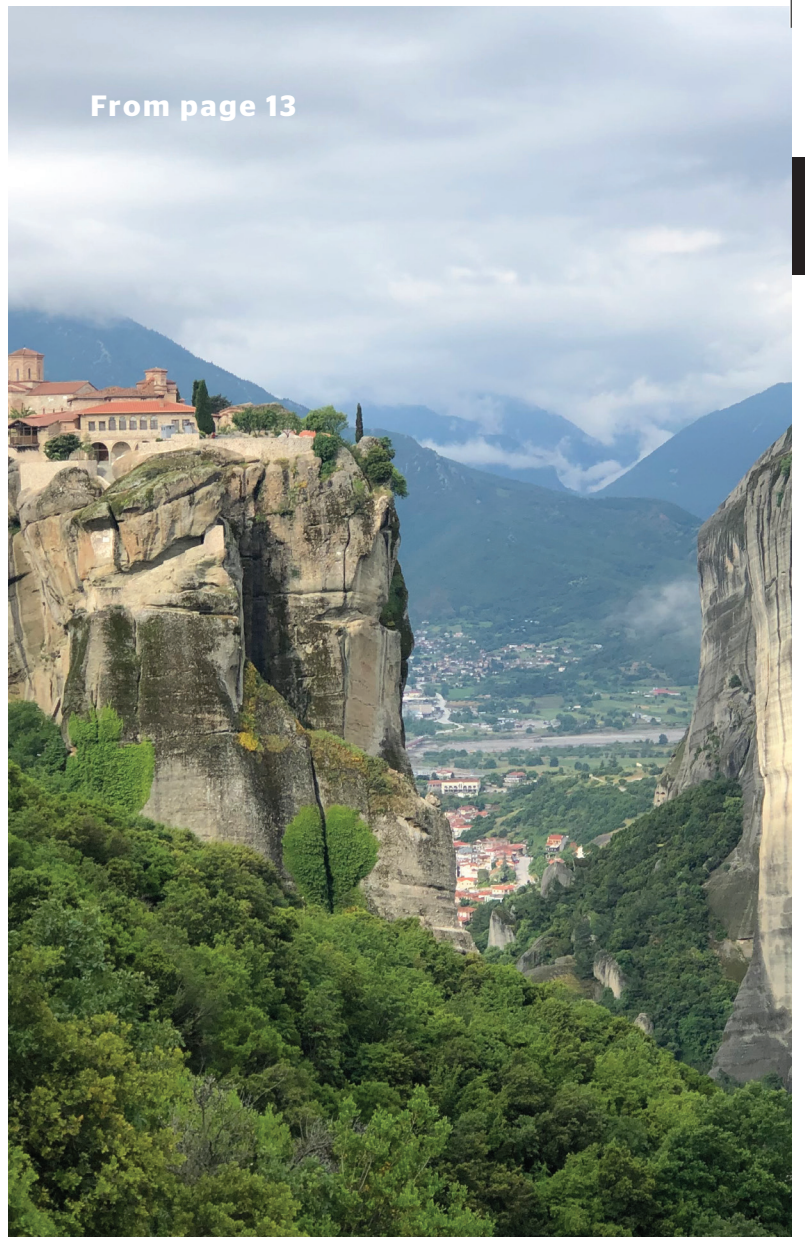


Retired pastor Peter Currie and wife Sue led a pilgrimage which retraced the Apostle Paul's footsteps in Greece and Turkey.  
PHOTOS: Warwick Bradley.



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## Packed with Love hampers create opportunities

By Jocelyn Heywood

Each Christmas, we can show the love of Jesus through practical assistance, providing food hampers and gifts that have been packed with love.

For many years, Jericho Road has had the privilege of partnering with The PWA Dorcas Committee and members of the Presbyterian community across NSW and ACT to distribute food and gift hampers to those in our communities who are finding the Christmas season hard.

Each year we aim for the hampers to help create opportunities for local churches to connect with people in their community and show love in a practical way. We do it as an expression of Jesus' love, letting people know that we are thinking of them at the time of our great Saviour's birth.

In 2025, the tradition continued with the help of more than 60 volunteers, gift donations from PLC Sydney and thousands of food contributions collected.

PWA women contributed \$7250 to purchase Foodbank Christmas supplies. It has been such an incredible show of support and all of us from Jericho Road have felt the love and support from this community.

We were able to give 280 food hampers, and 850 gift bags to families and individuals local to churches, schools, and preschools nominated to us by Presbyterian churches and in partnership with the Sydney Refugee Team.

Here are some messages we have received from recipients of these hampers. May you be as encouraged as we have been.

*"I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to Jericho Road for the food package*

*received through the Tregear Presbyterian Preschool. The food package was thoughtfully and generously prepared. I am thankful for the care and compassion shown by your organisation"*

*"Thank you for the wonderful Year End hamper—it was filled with so many thoughtful treats. Your generosity means a lot, and it really brightened our day!"*

A massive thank you to Macquarie Chapel Presbyterian Church in Marsfield for letting us use their facilities for our packing week and as storage in the lead up. Your generosity was greatly appreciated and made this week possible.

We look forward to what the new year brings and will be continuing to pray for all those who received a hamper.

If you would like to be a part of Packed with Love 2026, reach out to our team via email - [partnership@jerichoroad.org.au](mailto:partnership@jerichoroad.org.au).

**Jocelyn Heywood is Jericho Road Communications Assistant**



## METRO's vision for local churches

By Josiah Tijong, Epping Presbyterian

The METRO Committee of PCNSW stands for Ministry Equipping Training Recruiting Organisation and our 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).

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. Rev. Simon Wong METRO Convener G8 was a real encouragement for me.

When you're in the apprenticeship, it can become easy to get stuck in the day-to-day tasks you need to do, and the people you need to meet. But it was a real blessing to be able to step back, and be refreshed by God's Word and God's people.

I loved diving deep into 2 Corinthians in the main sessions. I loved hearing again the good news that though we are weak, that God is the one who comforts and encourages us, and that His power is displayed in our weakness.

As Christians, and as gospel workers, there are many times that we feel weak. It was refreshing to hear this word of comfort from God.

I also loved meeting other apprentices all around the country and hearing how God has been at work. It was rejuvenating to be able to bond over shared challenges and highlights, and learn from one another. One particular conversation stood out to me where an apprentice from Victoria was helping me walk through a discipleship conversation I needed to have with a member in my growth group.

I love that even though I have only met this guy once, God enabled us to encourage one another, sharpen one another, and pray for one another. Overall, I feel very encouraged seeing how God is at work in raising up gospel workers for the harvest.



## ‘We’re not alone’: How regional camps are growing faith in country NSW

Across NSW, PYNSW camps play a vital role in helping young people connect, grow, and stay grounded in their faith, especially for those in regional and rural areas where local youth groups can feel small or isolated.

While the iconic PY Summer Camp at Stanwell Tops reaches hundreds of young people each year, distance, cost, and time away from home can sometimes make it difficult for country kids to attend.

That’s where regional initiatives like Southern Rivers PY Flow Camp are making a real difference, offering a local, accessible space for faith, friendship, and encouragement.

### From a one-day idea to a full camp

Southern Rivers PY Flow Camp began modestly.

“We started with a one-day event back in 2023,” Mitchell explains. “A few youth leaders from our presbytery got together and said, ‘Let’s organise a day where the kids can meet each other, listen to good Bible teaching, and enjoy some fun and fellowship together.’”

After a couple of years, the young people themselves asked for more.

“After a couple of years, the kids themselves wanted to extend it into a full camp,” Mitchell says. “So, we thought, alright, let’s give it a crack.”

With the support and partnership of PYNSW, September 2025 saw the first Southern Rivers PY Flow Camp, held at PIM campsite in Ardlethan—a central location for churches from Griffith, Temora, Albury, Young, and beyond.

“It just worked,” Mitchell reflects. “It’s tied in with the local church, with PIM, and it’s not too far for anyone.”

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Around 35 people attended the inaugural camp, including 10 leaders. “On paper it might sound small, but for regional NSW, that’s an incredible start,” Mitchell says. “We’re already planning to grow it next year.”

### **Connection and confidence for country kids**

For many young people, Flow Camp offers something they rarely experience at home.

“Southern Rivers PY Flow Camp provides an alternative space for kids to connect with other young Christians closer to home,” Mitchell explains. “It’s a shorter camp, but still a chance to open the Bible together, to pray with and for each other, and to see that God’s family is bigger than their own youth group.”

### **One moment captured the heart of the camp**

“On the Saturday morning, a bunch of kids from different churches just wandered down into an open area and started their own soccer game,” Mitchell recalls. “Some of them had only met 24 hours earlier... Just seeing God’s family come together as His family, that was really encouraging.”

### **PYNSW partnership behind the scenes**

While Flow Camp was driven by local leaders, Mitchell is clear that PYNSW’s support was crucial.

“It would’ve been so much harder without PYNSW,” he says. “We adopted their permission forms, their feedback systems, their registration processes and data storage... being able to draw on that experience was massive.”

### **A growing movement in the regions**

Looking ahead, Mitchell is hopeful about what God is doing across country NSW.

“It’s easy for country kids to feel like they’re the only Christian around,” he says. “Flow helps them see they’re part of something bigger... It gives them confidence that they’re not alone.”

With continued support, regional camps like Flow can keep growing, helping young people encounter Jesus, find community, and stand firm in their faith, wherever they live.

## Caring for ministry families: The story of Refresh and the heart behind it

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By Emma Moxham

Every two years, ministers, ministry workers, and their families from across the Presbyterian Church of NSW (PCNSW) gather for Refresh—a retreat intentionally designed not as a conference or training event, but as a deliberate act of pastoral care.

For many, Refresh is a rare opportunity to step away from the constant rhythms of ministry to rest, reconnect with God, and be surrounded by people who understand both the privilege and the pressure of ministry life.

Few have seen the impact of Refresh more clearly than Rachel Norman, who has been involved since its earliest form in 1987. Reflecting on its purpose, Rachel is clear: this gathering exists because ministry families need intentional care.

### Why Refresh exists

Ministry is deeply joyful, but it can also be costly for ministers, spouses, and children alike. The pressures of Sunday rhythms, congregational expectations, emotional labor, and frequent isolation can slowly erode health and resilience.

Refresh exists as one excellent resource to strengthen health and resilience in ministry. “Healthy churches come from healthy leaders, and healthy leadership needs healthy families,” Rachel reflects. “That’s why caring for ministry families isn’t optional. It’s essential.”

Subsidised by the PCNSW, Refresh is intentionally accessible to every ministry household. Held midweek (Tuesday–Friday), it ensures ministers don’t miss a Sunday, and churches are encouraged to treat it as professional care rather than holiday leave.

Dave Phillips, PYNSW General Manager, explains: “It’s a tangible way for Sessions to show care for their minister – for many families, it’s a great boost to the sense of support they feel from their church.”

### A place to rest, reconnect, and be known

At its heart, Refresh is about creating space to rest, to laugh, to reflect, and to be known. It is the only gathering specifically for those in paid pastoral ministry in PCNSW and their families that is not a meeting or a court of the church.

Paul McKendrick, Associate Superintendent of Ministry and Mission, describes it as “a wonderful picture of the diversity of people serving Jesus across our state... all together to encourage one another in our relationship with Jesus.”

For adults, the program balances Bible teaching, workshops, discussion groups, and generous downtime.

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“Especially for those in rural or isolated contexts,” Rachel explains, “this is one of the few times they’re with people who truly ‘get it.’”

### **Thoughtful care for kids and teens**

A defining strength of Refresh is its commitment to the whole family. PYNSW coordinates age-specific programs for toddlers, primary-aged children, and high school students, alongside shared family sessions.

Rachel is intentional about the tone of the children’s and youth programs. “I tell our leaders, don’t assume these kids are Christians... This has to be a safe space for them to ask questions, express doubts, and be real.”

Led by teams that often include ministry kids themselves, these programs are deeply relational. “There’s something freeing about being with other kids who understand what it’s like to be a minister’s kid,” Rachel says.

### **A long legacy, a renewed purpose**

Refresh grew out of the Ministers’ Family Camp in the mid-1980s. While its name and shape have evolved, its purpose has not.

“It’s still about caring for those who care for others,” Rachel says.

For many ministry families, Refresh has become an anchor. An embodied reminder that the wider church sees them, values them, and is committed to their long-term flourishing.

“This isn’t just another program,” Rachel reflects. “It’s one of the ways the Presbyterian Church says, ‘We want you to thrive.’”

The next Refresh will be held 20-23 April 2027 at Stanwell Tops, focusing on Marriage and Family. More details to come.



## Reflection

# Prayer and Portuguese Tarts

By Matt George

One of the unexpected joys of ministry in Lisbon has been just how much life and ministry happens over coffee and pastries.

We arrived in late summer last year and it has been a blessing to meet up with locals who are checking out church, curious about the gospel or wondering why a couple of Aussies would move halfway across the world to talk about Jesus.

Those chats usually involve strong Portuguese espresso and the famous “pastel de nata”, the local custard tart, thankfully, much cheaper than what we would pay back in Sydney.

In Portugal, much like in Australia, coffee, food, and friendship often open the door to gospel conversations.

When Louise and I stepped off the plane in Lisbon, we didn't feel like we were starting something from scratch so much as stepping into something God already had underway.

We had already spent 12 years in Portugal between 2004 and 2016 working on university campuses training and discipling young people. We were sent in July 2025 by the Presbyterian Church of NSW as redeployed missionaries with APWM to help plant a Presbyterian church in Greater Lisbon.

A huge blessing has been teaming up with John and Ellen Buerger, fellow church planters from the United States with Mission to the World (MTW).

MTW is the global church-planting arm of the Presbyterian Church of America. They have different accents, but we believe in the same gospel and have the same heart for church planting. We are deeply encouraged by this partnership



with MTW. The gospel creates communities of faith shaped by His Word, marked by love, and committed to the Great Commission.

We are seeking to grow and nurture a Reformed and covenantal church in Greater Lisbon and join the European Mission Presbytery of the International Presbyterian Church (IPC).

The goal is not dependence upon cross-cultural workers, but mature, self-governing, self-supporting, and mission-sending churches.

Portugal has deep Catholic roots but these days many people would say they're “spiritual-but-not-religious” or nothing at all. Evangelical believers make up only a tiny slice of the population, often around one percent or less.

That means church planting here isn't about building big crowds quickly; it's about patiently nurturing gospel communities where there aren't many yet.

Most days the work feels ordinary: opening the Bible, praying, sharing meals, building relationships, walking alongside people in faith.

Last week a lady who has been attending said she finally got what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, having been in liberal churches all her life. We don't know exactly what this church will look like years down the track.

But we do know God is at work in Greater Lisbon, drawing people to Himself.

## Proverbs - The worth of wisdom

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By Rev Dr Peter Barnes



Intelligent people are quite capable of saying some very silly things.

In 2017-2018 the University of Sydney tried to mount an 'unlearn' campaign which was supposed to encourage students to question all their beliefs. One can think of better slogans.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw many quests to bring about universal education, often using the argument that the more we filled the schools, the fewer inmates would be found in jails.

Alas, wisdom, divorced from its foundation in the God who made us, has produced an odd collection of opinionated cranks and dilettantes, as well as sophisticated and articulate elites who miss the point.

In 1908 GK Chesterton saw something strange emerging on the not-too-distant horizon: 'We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. We are in danger of seeing philosophers who doubt the law of gravity as being a mere fancy of their own.'

In our own day, we have witnessed students who spend three years at tertiary level doing gender studies, and graduate not knowing if they are Arthur or Martha.

In this self-made muddle, what does God say about the wisdom that comes from Him? We must seek for it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures (Prov.2:4).

In fact, what we gain from wisdom is better than gain from silver, gold or jewels (3:14-15; 8:11, 19; 16:16). From God's wisdom, we receive long life,

riches and honour, pleasantness in our ways, and peace (13:16-17). Rather daringly, wisdom (personified as a woman) is a tree of life - as in the Garden of Eden, and in the cross at Calvary (13:18).

The best place for most to learn this wisdom is from the humble family circle rather than from a school of philosophers or the local daycare centre. 'Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight' (4:1). The father can say this because when he was young, he learnt from his father (4:3-4). Mothers too are to teach wisdom to their children (1:8; 6:20).

God 'possesses' wisdom, to use the ESV translation (see 8:22-31). Proverbs 8:22 was much debated during the Arian crisis of the fourth century. The Arians translated the word as 'created' and applied it to Christ, and so said He is only the highest of the angels.

In reply, Athanasius pointed out that God could never be without His wisdom. To imbibe God's wisdom fully revealed in Christ will increase our wisdom and learning (9:9). This last reference almost treats wisdom and righteousness as synonyms.

To be godly means we heed God's instructions and accept His reproofs (10:17).

All of this serves as a contrast to the wisdom of the world which tells us to believe in ourselves, and to follow our hearts.

No, for 'There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death' (14:12).

Repetition is needed in learning, so this is repeated in Proverbs 16:25. One night Arthur Pink

came home from a Theosophy meeting, and as he made his way to bed, his father quoted this verse to him. It gripped Pink, and was used in leading him eventually to Christ.

The difference between wisdom and folly is not simply intellectual but moral also. The direction of our hearts will reveal whether we are seeking knowledge or feeding on folly (15:14).

The wise man learns from God's word, of course, but also from experience, including observing the experience of others. When the scoffer is punished, the simple person observes this and learns from it, and becomes wise (21:11).

Today we depend too much on the laws of the land to provide us with wisdom and direction. For many, there seems no other road map for daily living. But God has entrusted us with His revealed truth.

As Charles Bridges comments: 'Nor is it only a mirror to show our defects. It is also a guidebook and a directory for godly conduct ... Wise rules are given for self-government.'

Godliness, wisdom and humility are interwoven. 'A man's steps are from the Lord; how then can man understand his way?' (20:24) To know what we don't know and can't know is a valuable part of wisdom (see Deut.29:29; James 4:13-15). No wonder God's wisdom is worth more than gold, silver and jewels. It humbles us and makes us wise; it makes us wise, but not to trust in our own wisdom. Here then is light from God.

## A date to remember

Put this in your diary ladies:

**18, 19, 20 September 2026**

The PWA is inviting you to a time to seek food for your Soul, Rest and Fellowship for the Body at the 2026 PWA Women's Retreat.

Accommodation will be at Bethshan Camp and Conference Centre at Wyee.

**Topic is:** Applying Faith to Life.

We would love women of all ages to come and join us, there will be a guest speaker to inspire, and a great time of delving into God's word and fellowship.

Please put this date in your diaries and we will keep you posted, with future booking details etc.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

**Camp Committee Contacts:**

Heather Beattie-Davey  
hdavey1957@gmail.com  
0419 280 623

Asenati Lole-Taylor  
0480 833 345  
asenati.loletaylor@gmail.com



