

MAY
2014

Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

Church music

AND THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

- + The god of Facebook
- & Cycling for a cause



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Churches might try to paper over music problems but they will get noticed eventually. P11

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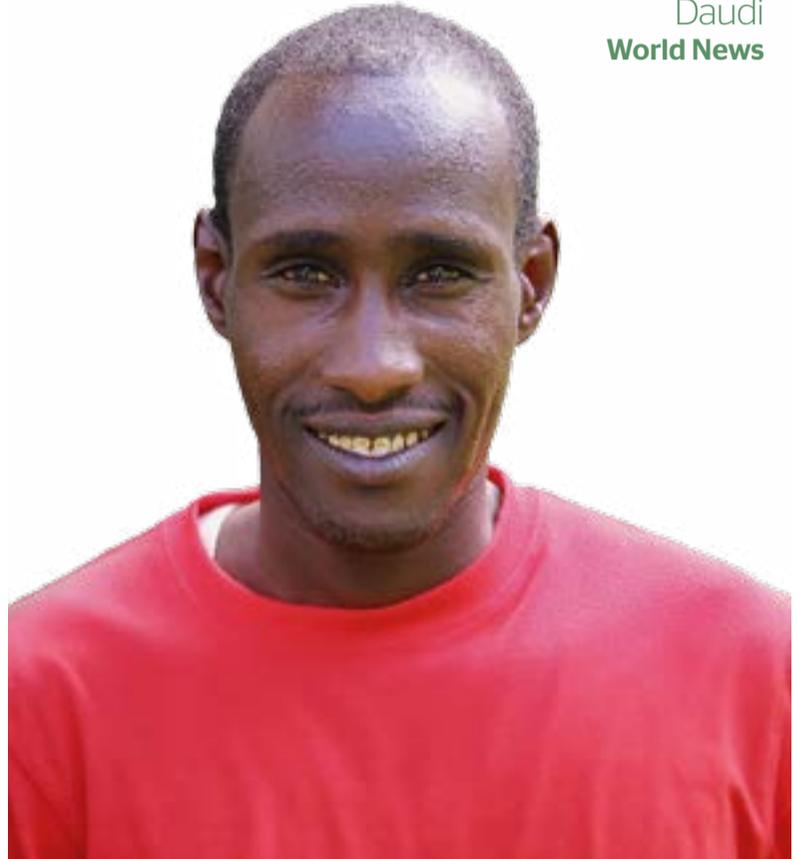
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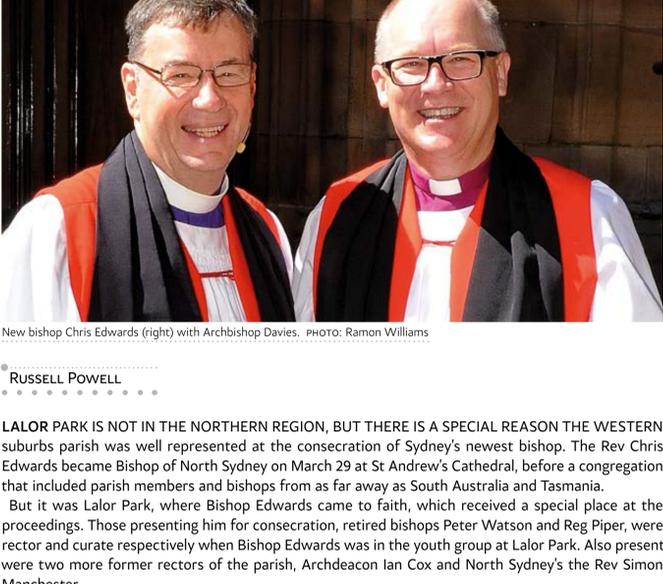
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From the west to the north



New bishop Chris Edwards (right) with Archbishop Davies. PHOTO: Ramon Williams

RUSSELL POWELL

LALOR PARK IS NOT IN THE NORTHERN REGION, BUT THERE IS A SPECIAL REASON THE WESTERN suburbs parish was well represented at the consecration of Sydney's newest bishop. The Rev Chris Edwards became Bishop of North Sydney on March 29 at St Andrew's Cathedral, before a congregation that included parish members and bishops from as far away as South Australia and Tasmania.

But it was Lalor Park, where Bishop Edwards came to faith, which received a special place at the proceedings. Those presenting him for consecration, retired bishops Peter Watson and Reg Piper, were rector and curate respectively when Bishop Edwards was in the youth group at Lalor Park. Also present were two more former rectors of the parish, Archdeacon Ian Cox and North Sydney's the Rev Simon Manchester.

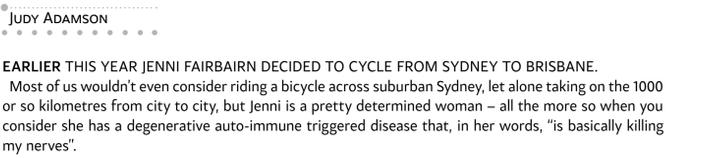
For his consecration Bishop Edwards, 52, carried the Bible used by his late father when he was commissioned for work with the Church Army. The new bishop is a church planter, with experience in Australia and overseas. He was the founding minister of Holy Trinity, Adelaide Hills in South Australia and later led St Paul's Anglican Church, Tervuren in Belgium. Since returning to Australia in 2012 he was mission director for Anglican Retirement Villages (ARV) in Sydney.

The CEO of ARV, Rob Freeman, prayed for Bishop Edwards as he began his new role. In his sermon Mr Manchester spoke from Acts 6, and also spoke of prayer support for the new bishop and his wife Belinda from around the Diocese.

"Your position is full of pressure – we are with you 100 per cent," Mr Manchester said. "Your position opens good doors. We hope you go through those doors strong in prayer and word and whether you speak to hundreds of outsiders who need saving faith or hundreds of insiders who need growing faith, we trust they will get from you a model of what pleases God and what his priorities are."

Bishop Edwards will have oversight of the Northern Region, which contains 64 parishes and stretches north from Sydney Harbour to the Central Coast. The previous bishop was Archbishop Davies, who held the position from 2001 until being named Archbishop last year.

Cycling for a cause



Queensland ahead: Jenni Fairbairn on her fundraising 'ride' to Brisbane.

JUDY ADAMSON

EARLIER THIS YEAR JENNI FAIRBAIRN DECIDED TO CYCLE FROM SYDNEY TO BRISBANE.

Most of us wouldn't even consider riding a bicycle across suburban Sydney, let alone taking on the 1000 or so kilometres from city to city, but Jenni is a pretty determined woman – all the more so when you consider she has a degenerative auto-immune triggered disease that, in her words, "is basically killing my nerves".

In the decade or so since she was diagnosed, not only has the disease attacked Jenni's autonomic nerves – affecting things she has no control over like her heart and bladder – but it has moved on to organs such as her bowel and brain. Over time a range of other problems such as epilepsy and osteoporosis have arisen. And there is no known cure.

So how can the 43-year-old ride when her balance is also so badly affected that she needs a walking frame? Simple. She cycles on a stationary bike in ARV's Lady Gowrie Nursing Home in Gordon, where she has lived for more than 12 months. And earlier this year she set herself the goal of "cycling" the distance to Brisbane in order to raise funds for research into her condition.

"I'm limited in what I can do, and pedalling just seemed the most obvious thing," she says. "I thought, 'That's a goal: something I can do, and enjoy doing, but it won't be easy for me'. It's a very big challenge to set myself.

"When I told my physio I was surprised – she got so excited, she was like, 'Right, we're putting posters up and getting staff to sponsor you!' She really got into it."

Jenni's faith has been an anchor throughout her illness. It has been tremendously hard to give up her job as a primary teacher, to struggle with the physical deterioration of her body and to relinquish her independence to live in a nursing home where most residents are double her age. But she says she has never turned on God in anger or asked why this was happening to her.

"I've got a very simple faith," she says. "It's a very childlike faith. I just call out to him. At times when I've been really sick in hospital I've been scared, and at times doubted... but I think in a lot of ways this has made me a much stronger person. I'm definitely not angry at God – it's made me turn to him rather than away from him, because I needed that extra friend, that extra support who understood, who I could go to at any time. In those dark hours at night when I'm alone he's the only one who's there.

"I was going to have a big family, I was going to do this and that, and I felt like all my dreams had been taken from me. I thought, 'How can I ever do anything? I'm just useless now'. But even though I've got an illness, I can be used in this situation. I can buddy up with a few of the elderly people who don't know where to go for meals and so on.

"I've tried to put my faith into action in a different area so it's not wasted. No-one's immune to bad stuff happening – it's just how you respond to it."

The Fairbairn family goes to Christ Church, St Ives, where a number of parishioners have signed up to sponsor Jenni, as have members of the church her chaplain attends – St Swithun's, Pymble. Family of other patients at Lady Gowrie also want to donate, but Jenni set herself the target of riding the distance during the month of April, and is adamant she will take no money unless she achieves this.

She has kept a tally sheet by the bike she uses, and has sought to do between one and three cycling sessions a day – "travelling" about 12 kilometres every 40 minutes.

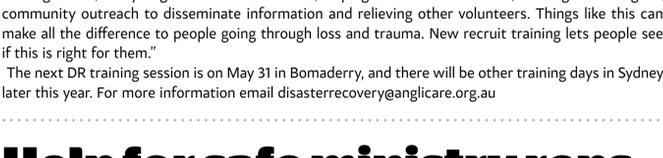
"My legs do get very tired, but I just seem to be able to push through that tiredness and keep on going because I know there's a goal at the end," she says.

On the day Jenni spoke to *Southern Cross* her kilometre tally had her approaching Ballina on the NSW north coast. She was confident that – barring an unexpected hurdle – she would be riding into Brisbane by April 30.

"I'm very stubborn so there'd have to be a pretty big kangaroo on the road to stop me from getting there," she says with a laugh.

Readers can make tax-deductible donations to Jenni Fairbairn's Brisbane ride. For donation details send an email to Jenni_fairbairn@yahoo.com.au

Out of the ashes



Burnt out: remains of the Carr's garden shed, with their neighbour's property in the background.

LEA CARSWELL

"FROM THE ROAD, IT LOOKED AS THOUGH OUR HOUSE HAD NOT BEEN AFFECTED," RECALLS LOUISE Carr, who has become one of the new recruits on Anglicare's Nepean Disaster Recovery (DR) team.

That was Buena Vista Road, Winmalee, one of the streets devastated during the freakish bushfires of October 17 last year.

Louise Carr and her husband were overseas at the time. Coming home, they found a house with extensive fire damage on every side, in the roof, the guttering and inside the house.

"The insurance company has just agreed to replace the roof completely, which is great news," she says. "Since moving back in on January 18, we've had rainwater leaking most days into our repaired bedroom!"

In the weeks following the fires, Mrs Carr noticed the hard work of volunteers, doorknocking in pairs to share vital information with residents who had been affected. They visited Buena Vista Road residents several times, knocking on every door that was still standing.

"In the recovery centre and around the area, I kept bumping into Heather Gwilliam, who I'd known for years but hadn't seen for a while," Mrs Carr says. "She is an Anglicare DR team leader. I told her I wanted to get trained to be involved so that I can care for others in the same way as we were cared for."

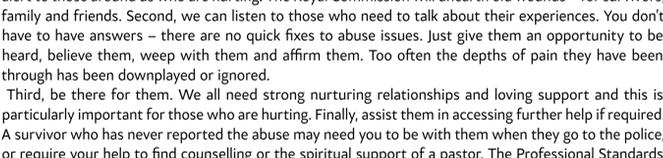
Mrs Carr attended new recruit training, held at Emu Plains Anglican Church, in February. She is now a member of Heather Gwilliam's team and looking forward to the next team meeting in June.

English Singestre, the Disaster Recovery Manager for Anglicare in NSW, is keen to encourage more volunteers for this important mission. "We would like to never need disaster welfare, but in reality things happen that a local community just can't handle like fires, floods, storms or even man-made emergencies," she says.

"When these things happen, people often ask, 'How can I help?' Our volunteers are already trained and registered, ready to go at a moment's notice, helping at evacuation centres, offering a listening ear, community outreach to disseminate information and relieving other volunteers. Things like this can make all the difference to people going through loss and trauma. New recruit training lets people see if this is right for them."

The next DR training session is on May 31 in Bomaderry, and there will be other training days in Sydney later this year. For more information email disasterrecovery@anglicare.org.au

Help for safe ministry reps



A LIAISON OFFICER HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO SUPPORT SAFE MINISTRY REPRESENTATIVES AS GOVERNMENTS implement a new accredited scheme for church workers and volunteers. The Rev Neil Atwood, (above) who is the executive assistant to Bishop Ivan Lee, now also takes on a part-time role liaising with parish safe ministry representatives.

"Their work has just become much more complex," Mr Atwood says about the role of the person appointed in each parish as a contact, who also ensures that safe ministry practices are being followed. "As the new 'Working with Children Check' comes onstream, the requirements for parishes increases, and so helping reps establish good record keeping and other compliance practices is important."

Mr Atwood says his role will include providing advice and support to the parishes as well as helping develop policy, training and resources. Monitoring Diocese-wide compliance will also be needed. "With the previous phase of the 'Working with Children Check' we had to get all of our clergy and lay staff validated by the end of March which we did – we had them [done] by the end of January," he says.

The second phase involves making sure all volunteers in child-related activities in churches are registered. "It's exactly the same process that the paid staff went through, involving a trip to a motor registry to lodge a form, except that volunteers do not have to pay for their 'Working with Children Check' number," he says. While ensuring paid staff were registered was a logistical challenge, Mr Atwood says the volunteer checks are even more so. "We actually don't know how many volunteers we have in the Diocese, but we figure it will be between 5000 and 10,000."

The initial response to the new position has been positive. Mr Atwood says he's already had contact with at least 60 safe ministry representatives and motivation and enthusiasm has been high. Despite the increase in paperwork, he says, "I think this is something we should welcome because this gives us a much higher degree of confidence that the people who are working with children and young people in our parishes do not have any past convictions – or even past offences that may not have been recorded as convictions – against their name anywhere in Australia."

Mr Atwood is also realistic about the challenge of getting so many people registered, but says the new check is an important part of screening for safe ministry. "While it is another process to do and it can be a hassle, it is only once every five years and I think that is a small price to pay."

If you are a safe ministry representative and you haven't already heard from Neil Atwood by email or post, please contact him on nta@sydney.anglican.asn.au

Abuse and our response

KEITH CONDIE

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHURCH IS ACCUSED OF DOING WRONG AND IT IS FOUND TO BE true? What happens when the church is better known for evil deeds over and above its good works? We are left with a huge credibility problem and our mission to take the message of Jesus Christ to a lost and truth world is compromised.

The reality is that the church has failed. As stories emerge from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse these failings are paraded for all to see. We can say, "That was the Catholic Church" or "That was a different Anglican diocese". But we as Sydney Anglicans also have dirt on our hands. In the dozen or so years I have been involved in these matters, I have listened to parents whose children have been sexually abused by church workers in this Diocese. Those conversations have been among the most disturbing experiences of my life. And in our post-Christian culture most people aren't clued into the "branding" of different Christian groups anyway. A problem with child abuse in one church denomination is a problem for us all.

Research has shown that a key "brand for belief" is church abuse. So what can we do? First, we can be alert to those around us who are hurting. The Royal Commission will unearth old wounds – for survivors, family and friends. Second, we can listen to those who need to talk about their experiences. You don't have to have answers – there are no quick fixes to abuse issues. Just give them an opportunity to be heard, believe them, weep with them and affirm them. Too often the depths of pain they have been through has been downplayed or ignored.

Third, be there for them. We all need strong nurturing relationships and loving support and this is particularly important for those who are hurting. Finally, assist them in accessing further help if required. A survivor who has never reported the abuse may need you to be with them when they go to the police, or require your help to find counselling or the spiritual support of a pastor. The Professional Standards Unit of the Diocese is a key resource for these matters (see www.psu.anglican.asn.au). Another way to express concern is to attend the annual Tears and Hope service for survivors of abuse held at St John's, Darlinghurst, this year planned for November 3 at 7pm.

There has been a twin focus in the Diocese upon prevention and ensuring a compassionate and just response when allegations of abuse emerge. Training in child protection and safe ministry is mandatory for all who work with children in our churches. The New Working With Children Check in NSW provides an enhanced level of screening. Safe ministry representatives in each parish are required to facilitate compliance with these obligations. Furthermore, safe ministry modules are being taught at Moore College, Youthworks College, and in Ministry Training and Development as part of their courses and programs.

The Safe Ministry Board has also produced a range of other policies designed to reduce the risk of abuse within our churches. The Royal Commission presents an important opportunity for the Diocese to review past and current practices from a best practice perspective. Sometimes these requirements might appear onerous, but this is precisely what we need to create a culture of awareness and responsiveness to any risk of harm to the vulnerable.

In situations of abuse, the goal is to provide a timely, compassionate and just response. The Professional Standards Unit has a chaplain to provide pastoral care and support. Parish Recovery Teams assist churches where abuse has occurred and there is an assistance scheme to provide financial help to meet the needs of those who have suffered abuse from clergy or church workers.

Given the darkness that inhabits each human heart, it is naïve to think that abuse can be eliminated entirely from our churches. But it is our hope and prayer that, with the policies and procedures that have been put in place, it will be much harder for this to occur. As we seek to respond to this issue with wisdom, compassion and justice perhaps the church will be seen for its good deeds (1 Peter 2:12) and begin to win back the trust of our wider society.

Keith Condie is chairman of the Safe Ministry Board. He also lectures at Moore College and has been involved in safe ministry activities since 2002. For information about dealing with belief blockers see www.towardsbelief.org.au

St Philip's helps in mission to new migrants in Auburn

NICK GILBERT

ST PHILIP'S, AUBURN IS EMBARKING ON A FOOD PROGRAM TO ASSIST NEW MIGRANTS MOVING into the area, many of whom are asylum seekers.

Since the cessation of onshore detention under the Rudd Labor Government in late 2013, many asylum seekers previously in detention centres were released into community detention, able to move freely but without the ability to earn an income, and with only minimal financial support delivered through third party aid organisations.

The multicultural mix of Auburn, as well as its designation by the local council as a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2004, has seen many asylum seekers move into the area, with St Philip's assisting some 80 new migrants late last year. The current assistant minister of St Philip's, the Rev Tim Cocks, says the project is still in its early days.

"In terms of the food program, we haven't started to implement that yet," he says. "We've got the money, but the implementation is yet to happen – that's where we're at, at this point."

The church has also been assisted in its mission to serve the many cultures in its parish by Mr Cocks' old church, St John's, Asquith.

"When Tim decided to move on to Auburn to commit to repotting that church I thought it was a brave move," says the Rev Brian Heath, the rector at Asquith, where Mr Cocks previously served as assistant minister. "When [Tim] asked whether he could take some of our key people, including my rector's warden, I didn't hesitate. It is all about gospel generosity. If we could partner with a church to make a difference in a highly multicultural area in Sydney than what is there to think about?"

Both Mr Cocks and Mr Heath say they moved from Asquith to Auburn as a link missionary set-up. The four families that made the move were formally commissioned by Asquith. The church has committed to three years of giving to the work of ministry in Auburn and is committing the church to prayer, as well as occasionally assisting at special events.

"It has taught us about gospel generosity," Mr Heath says. "We have a God who gave up his own son for us. If we can enable a ministry to get up and running again in a hard but strategic area that is important. It has reminded me about the enthusiasm that comes with a new venture. Hearing and seeing of the excitement at Auburn has enthused our own people for mission as well."

AT A TIME WHEN MOST PEOPLE ARE THINKING about pulling back from ministry, 79-year-old Nola Booth (right) is raring to go – which is why when the rector of Sadlier, David O'Mara, asked her to start a "friendship service" in 2012, she couldn't wait to do it. "We run a community barbecue along with Anglicare once a month at the church," she says. "You meet a lot of people there and get to know them, and I just got the idea of starting a friendship group on a Friday. I'd make a cup of tea, we'd sit around a table and chat and maybe have a bit of Christian input like a video or something, but nothing too heavy. I didn't want to frighten them away.

"That ran for about 12 months, and was fulfilling a need, so [in 2012] David got the idea that I should run a friendship service on a Sunday evening. I used to be the women's worker at Sadlier and I stopped about two years ago, but I didn't want to give away ministry altogether. So now I'm a voluntary community outreach worker."

Mrs Booth developed a half-hour meeting with a 10-minute sermon, music and simple prayers that members of the congregation could say in turn, creating something accessible and engaging for the 35 or so people who attend each week. The group then has a meal afterwards.

The church's parish partnership with Anglicare has also helped. Anglicare's local area manager, Michael Mittwollen, has been instrumental in developing the joint relationship and encouraging people who attend the community barbecue to go to the friendship service.

Says Mr O'Mara: "We're actually reaching people who don't go to church. Often a lot of Sydney Anglicanism is a middle-class approach, but the whole issue of contextualisation has been very important here. One of the ladies used to go to another church, and she wasn't 'anti' that church but said, 'I just couldn't understand what the preacher was saying'.

"People are hungry for God's word. The gospel is powerful but it needs to be communicated in a relevant manner so people understand. I couldn't have done what Nola has done. She's a local – she's got a ruggedness and a toughness about her and yet with a real compassionate heart for people. We're getting people here with real needs, they're taking part in the service, they're growing in confidence... and we've had a number of people converted. It's exciting."

Mrs Booth, in turn, says what she is doing is a "privilege". "He [God] is really the one who started it," she says. "It's nothing I've done. If we didn't have a great God none of this would be happening."



NI's "Macedonian call"



All Saints Kingston, (once the penal colony's commissariat store). PHOTO: bertknot

THERE HAS BEEN A PLEA TO SAVE THE CHURCH ON NORFOLK ISLAND AMID FEARS CHRISTIAN witness may eventually disappear from the settlement without support from the mainland.

The island, a three-hour flight from Sydney, has a population of about 1500 people and caters for up to 700 tourists a week. There is a hospital, a radio station, and an international-standard airport. The Islanders have their own language as well as a Chief Minister and parliament with power to make and enforce laws.

Norfolk Island was settled in 1856 by descendants of the *Bounty* mutiny who moved there from Pitcairn Island. This group set about growing Christian ministry on Norfolk and further afield, even establishing a Melanesian Training College to train and evangelise Pacific Islanders.

The Church of England, as the Anglican Church on the island is known, has been a significant part of the island's life since the 19th century. Its two church buildings, All Saints' at Kingston (the Pitcairners' church) and St Barnabas' Chapel (the church for the Melanesian community), are of historic significance.

However, concern has been raised about the future of the church by the Sydney Diocese's bishop overseeing the ministry, Bishop Robert Forsyth, and the most recent locum on the island, Canon Bruce Ballantine-Jones. In a report prepared for the Archbishop after consultation with the Norfolk Island parish council, the pair argue that there must be a revival in ministry to address declining numbers at all churches.

"The recent practice of supplying short-term, part-time, retired clergy as chaplains has kept the basic functions going but has not been able to supply the kind of leadership necessary to revive the church and take advantage of the evangelistic opportunities on the island," the report says. The parish council on Norfolk Island has set up a sub-committee and asked for help in what the report described as "a 'Macedonian call' from people who love the Lord, love their church and love their Island".

The parish council, with support from Bishop Forsyth and Canon Ballantine-Jones, is asking for a \$50,000 grant a year, for five years, to help fund a "full-time young chaplain who, like a CMS missionary, will see this as a call from God". The report warns that without such rejuvenation the long-term viability of the parish is threatened.

Bishop Forsyth and Canon Ballantine-Jones say the parish of Norfolk Island is different from all others because of its isolation. "Being an island 1500 kilometres from Australia means that if we turn our back on them, they have nowhere else to go for Christian support."

“Grave disquiet” about children in detention



An illustration is attached to the fence at Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation as part of a protest, 2011.

PHOTO: John Englart

RUSSELL POWELL

ARCHBISHOP GLENN DAVIES HAS JOINED OTHER AUSTRALIAN ANGLICAN LEADERS IN EXPRESSING concern about the number of children held in detention.

The Anglican archbishops of Australia issued a joint statement last month deploring the fact that recent figures suggested about 1000 children would spend Easter in Australian-sponsored detention.

“As leaders of the Anglican Church of Australia we wish to put on record our profound disquiet that at the end of February this year there were more than 950 children in detention facilities and alternative places of detention in Australia, and a further 177 children in offshore detention in Nauru,” the statement said.

“The average time people spend in detention is more than eight months.”

The archbishops said they were “not seeking to express a party political opinion on this matter” but were reflecting the fact that “within our Church there is grave disquiet about the asylum seeker policies of both major parties”.

“While our Federal Government has been drawing attention to the number of days without boat arrivals, this is another set of numbers that needs close scrutiny. These children are innocent victims of tragic circumstances.

“To use the words of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, detention of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time.”

The statement, issued to coincide with Palm Sunday, went on to say: “It is our view that those who flee from desperate circumstances by boat should not be punished by prolonged detention whether in Australia, Nauru or Manus Island.

“They are not the people smugglers. They are people made in the image of God, who deserve respect from all Australians, but especially our Government and its agencies. They come to Australia out of desperation, fleeing religious, ethnic or economic persecution. They seek asylum under the Refugee Convention that as a nation we have signed. Many will be found to be refugees, as the Government’s own statistics demonstrate.”

The statement called on the Australian Government to “ensure that asylum seekers are treated humanely and respectfully by those charged with their care and protection, and that they are attended to in a timely manner”.

Dr Davies signed the statement, along with the Bishop of Tasmania and the Metropolitans of all states.

Former actor elected Riverina bishop

AN EVANGELIST AND FORMER ACTOR, WHO IS CURRENTLY the rector of a central London church, has been elected as the new Bishop of Riverina.

The Rev Alan Robert (Rob) Gillion, 63, is rector of Holy Trinity, Sloane Square and St Saviour, Upper Chelsea in the diocese of London.

He is a member of the Archbishops’ (of Canterbury and York) College of Evangelists and a contributor and advisor to the BBC for religious broadcasts, taking part in radio programs such as *Pause for Thought*.

The new bishop-elect trained as an actor at the University of London and worked as an actor and theatre director for 12 years before entering the ministry. Prior to ordination he studied at the Theological College of Salisbury and Wells.

Bishop-elect Gillion (right) was ordained in 1983 in the diocese of Norwich and also served in the dioceses of Southwark and Hong Kong before returning to London in 1999. He is married to Janine, whom he met when they were both drama students. They have two sons, one of whom lives in Melbourne.

The diocese of Riverina covers more than one-third of rural NSW, including centres such as Griffith, Broken Hill and Deniliquin.

The diocese is aptly named, being watered by “four rivers” – the Murray, Murrumbidgee, Darling and Lachlan.

The new bishop was elected at a special synod and will be consecrated and enthroned as Bishop of Riverina on Friday, August 15 at Saint Alban’s Cathedral, Griffith.



Grace above good works



Daudi (right) with Munguishi Bible College principal Mike Taylor.

WHEN DAUDI ARRIVED AT MUNGUISHI BIBLE COLLEGE (MBC) IN TANZANIA'S NORTH HE WANTED to learn how to be a good person. But what he discovered was far more valuable.

"I thought that when I believed in Jesus, God removed all my sins; that I would do good and only good," he explains. "I came to learn the Bible so I could return and be a good person, but now I want to preach the Bible and tell others about God's great work."

He discovered that "the Bible is one book with one message of how God has saved sinners, but before I thought the Bible was many books all saying something different."

Daudi's experience is not unusual. Ministry candidates from throughout Tanzania come to MBC in Arusha to study – and according to CMS missionary and MBC principal Mike Taylor, many have not understood the gospel of grace.

"Our students come with many different ideas about God and about ministry," he says. "We work hard with them and pray that God will give them an understanding of the gospel; that they would believe in Jesus, that they would know the importance of godliness, especially in ministry."

False teaching in Tanzania takes the form of the prosperity doctrine – where material blessing and success is more or less promised to converts – and salvation is based on works.

"It's grace that teaches and empowers us to live for God," Mike says. "We are starting to understand more and more that a shallow or mistaken understanding of gospel fundamentals affects everything – ministry, prayer and evangelism."

The church in Tanzania is growing rapidly. There are not enough trained ministers to meet the demand, so many churches are led by pastors with little or no Bible training.

This is one of the reasons why MBC's ministry is so strategic. The college offers one-year and three-year courses in Swahili and English. In addition, MBC has begun to hold regular preaching seminars for pastors as well as students.

"We train our students to know the gospel, live out a gospel life and to preach the gospel," Mike says. "Our focus is on servant leadership and biblically based preaching. We have seen God do amazing things in the lives of students like Daudi and hope to see more."

The CMS end-of-financial-year appeal is under way. To support the work of missionaries such as Mike Taylor you can donate at www.give.cms.org.au.

Bishop's egg solution



Precious cargo: a young Rwandan boy chooses his egg for the day.

SYDNEY ANGLICANS ARE SUPPORTING AN INNOVATIVE NUTRITION PROJECT IN NORTHERN Rwanda, one of the areas hardest hit by the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

Centred in the Anglican diocese of Shyira, which borders Uganda to the north and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west, the "One Egg a Day" campaign was the brainchild of the local bishop, Dr Laurent Mbanda.

It began with the plight of thousands of children between the age of two and five, left unsupervised in local villages while their parents worked in the fields for a pittance. After opening church buildings during the week to accommodate preschools for the unattended children, the problem of malnutrition remained. Because their diet consisted only of starch, many suffered from a protein deficiency.

A North American social entrepreneur has since set up a poultry farm where eggs are being produced on a commercial scale to resource the One Egg A Day Project. Currently there are 1500 eggs being produced daily and distributed in 17 of the 200 diocese's preschools.

"As well as providing essential protein in the child's diet, the project generates employment at the poultry farm where the eggs are produced," says Anglican Aid director the Rev David Mansfield. "It's more simple than brilliant but it's brilliant because it's so simple."

The Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid is highlighting the project to mark the 20th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

More than a numbers game



PHOTO: Anders Alexander

MARK SHORT

I GREATLY ENJOYED READING THE ARTICLE IN MARCH *SOUTHERN CROSS* ABOUT PAST AND FUTURE conferences and how they influence the shape of Christianity down under. It got me wondering about the influence that happens on a smaller scale.

I believe every Christian wants to make a difference. Whether lay or ordained, we want to know that God is using our flawed efforts in ministry to influence others for his glory. We might pretend otherwise, but years of listening to colleagues as well as my own heart have convinced me it is best to be honest about these longings so they can be shaped in the light of Scripture.

So, how do we discern influence? It's easy to value most what is easiest to measure and the easiest way to measure influence is through numbers – the numbers who attend a conference, who are present to hear us preach, who come to our Bible study or join the youth group we lead.

Numbers certainly tell us something, but they can't tell us everything. Physical presence is no guarantee of transformation – just ask any preacher! If we measure influence purely by numbers we risk having our sense of worth captive to the roller-coaster ride of head counting. Moreover, what of people called to serve in places where numbers will inevitably be smaller, such as rural communities? Do they miss out in the influence stakes?

Let me suggest three shifts that will help us gain a healthy sense of influence in ministry.

FROM HIERARCHY TO NETWORK

A simple measure of ministry influence equates it with the number of people directly or indirectly under our oversight. But what if ministry influence is less like building a pyramid and more like weaving a web? Some of the most influential Christians I've known have not grown large ministries but have worked horizontally to influence countless others through their example and encouragement.

FROM KEEPING TO SENDING

I was recently chatting with a minister who serves with the Bush Church Aid Society in a mining town where the workforce turnover means they are constantly farewelling people from their congregation. He spoke of the importance of a kingdom mindset and being able to rejoice in the opportunity of sending people to serve elsewhere rather than keeping them for his church. Indeed, they have developed a link relationship with a church in their capital city so they can do exactly this.

It seems to me that while in the past it was common to measure the "success" of a church by the number of people it had sent to the mission field, we now focus more on other metrics such as congregational attendance or the size of a staff team. Has something important been lost in this shift?

FROM SEEING TO TRUSTING

I reckon this is the hardest but most important transition to make in our understanding of influence. The apostle Paul recognised the profound influence one Christian can have on the lives of others, but also knew the true nature of that influence would only be seen at the end of time when each person's work in ministry is tested by God's refining fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-13). Perhaps that's why he calls the Thessalonians the hope, joy and crown "in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes" (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

Read through 2 Timothy and you can't help feel that if influence is all about observable numbers then Paul had every reason to feel a failure, especially when some of his closest associates had dumped him. But Paul writes that he is not ashamed "because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Just like the rest of Christian life, ministry influence means walking by faith and not by sight.

As I write this article BCA is looking for a ministry couple to serve in a country town of just over 1000 people. In such a setting the congregation or staff team numbers will probably never be massive, but the potential for influence is immeasurable. I can think of no better place to learn to make the shift.

The Rev Dr Mark Short is national director of the Bush Church Aid Society.

Well-considered essays in response to issues raised by *SC* (700-word maximum) can be emailed to newspaper@anglicanmedia.com.au

MOVES



WESTWARD, HARRICKS

The **Rev Tom Harricks** becomes the rector of Penrith next month.

Mr Harricks has been part of the ministry at St John's Cathedral in Parramatta for eight years, spending his first two years as a student minister before becoming an assistant minister in 2008. He was made senior assistant minister in 2012.

"I've enjoyed the complexity of our ministry here," he says. "I've looked after our large morning congregation, and it's a wonderful group. The subcontinental membership has grown from 20 per cent to 40 per cent, so it's been fantastic, and I spend lots of time with my friends from the subcontinent."

Mr Harricks says he has enjoyed Parramatta as a "city church", adding that there is a lot of similarity between the cathedral and St Stephen's, Penrith. "They're both churches in the centre of the city, and churches that appreciate the traditional heritage of the Anglican services. And in Penrith particularly there's increasing diversity expected over the next 10 years as migrants

move further west for cheaper housing."

He says his enthusiasm for the move began when speaking to nominators from St Stephen's.

"They were straight shooters and clearly wanted to reach Penrith, and do more to reach Penrith, so that was a great introduction to the church," he says. "I'm excited about building and shaping the kids' ministry there and training staff so that the youth can continue to grow in maturity and in number. I'm really keen, fundamentally, to investigate and articulate a vision for discipleship – what that might look like, and to start to put that into place.

"But in the short term I guess I'm looking to sit in as many loungerooms of people in Penrith as I can by the end of the year!"

Mr Harricks' induction service will be on June 17.

FOND FAREWELLS

After almost 32 years as rector of Holy Trinity, Wentworth Falls, the **Rev Dr Neil Emerson** will retire on June 8.

"We came in 1982 and we certainly never intended to stay that length of time," he says. "But things happen – our children were all born while we were here, there was a church building project that kicked off and then opened in the late '80s... We just saw more ministry opportunities opening up where we were rather than feeling the need to go off somewhere else so we ended up staying. There's always been something happening or new things to do – we've never been short of a vision or an opportunity!"

Dr Emerson acknowledges that leaving after such a long time is a wrench for the family.

"There's a lot of emotional attachment to the place," he says. "When we had our farewell just the other Sunday I was speaking, and at the end of it I looked down and here's my wife sobbing away in the front seat. I didn't cry but I did feel it. I've baptised people who have grown up here and are still in the congregation and involved in ministry here... and I've married them and so on.

"Long-term ministry has got its difficulties but it's got a lot of advantages. I think, after a number of years, people get to know you and they see you as their minister. You're not just here for 'a time'. You're the one they come to and relate to and that's been good."

The immediate future will see Dr Emerson spend at least three more months in the Blue Mountains as locum to the parish of Blackheath. After that, options are open, with one possibility being a move back to the family's old stamping ground of Wollongong.

IN BRIEF

Dr Lindsay Stoddart, formerly Archdeacon of Wollongong and Dean of Hobart and a presbyter of the Diocese of Sydney, has voluntarily relinquished his orders for health reasons. Dr Stoddart has suffered bipolar disorder since leaving his role as CEO of Anglican Youthworks.

The rector of St Philip's, Eastwood, the **Rev Chris Burgess**, will retire on June 20. More information in a future edition.

VALE

The **Rev Ron King** died on March 28 of brain cancer.

Born on June 23, 1935, Ronald Charles King grew up in Sydney, attending Artarmon OC and Sydney Technical High School, and became a Christian at the age of 14.

Mr King worked for 15 years as a laboratory technician, but had spent many years as an active member of beach mission teams up and down the NSW coast (and continued to support and visit local mission teams every year of his life) and felt called to be an evangelist. So he left his job and studied at the Church Army's College of Evangelism from 1971-72. He then became a parish evangelist at Erskineville, followed by Randwick, before doing further theological training. He was ordained in the Riverina diocese in 1979, and was curate to the parish of Leeton as well as resident priest at Ganmain, east of Narrandera.

Mr King worked for Presbyterian Home Mission in Sydney in the early 1980s, then from 1983-95 was honorary assistant priest at Toukley-Budgewoi in the Newcastle diocese while he worked for the then Department of Social Security.

He retired in 1994, but spent many years preaching and visiting in parishes across the country. He was honorary assistant minister for two years in Wyong, and then for seven years at St Jude's, Dural – roles Mr King's wife Frances said "he enjoyed immensely". In later years Mr King was also involved with the organisation Knitting for Africa, creating many squares for rugs to be given out to people across Africa, particularly Tanzania.

Frances King described her husband as "a godly and kind man, a family man who was faithful in every way", and particularly recalled a verse that was very important to him:

"As it is written:

'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him"

(1 Corinthians 2:9).



SUPPORT NEEDED FOR ALL

I am writing in response to "Bound: same-sex attraction, human frailty and God's love" (SC, April). I am straight and was, for 10 years, a content member of a Sydney Anglican church. This association only ended when I left Sydney and for no other reason.

First, let me say it was a relief to see David McIntyre advocated a loving response. If our policy was to exclude all sinners from church we would all, of course, have to stay home from now on.

It was good to see he consulted people such as Dr Weerakoon, who have respected scientific training. I am also glad to see ministers realise this is now an issue that needs to be addressed.

I was disappointed, however, to see the use of the terminology "same-sex lifestyle" and "gay lifestyle". Perhaps those were "Tom's" own words, but that is not clear. If "same-sex sexual relationships" is what is meant, that ought to be made clear. Unfortunately those terms are offensive to many LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex) people who don't want to march semi-clothed in a Mardi Gras parade and definitely don't wish to be involved in promiscuous sex or view pornography. Some people clearly do those things, but many do not. It also implies that heterosexual people don't do those things, when clearly many do.

Where does this leave LGBTI people who have never been involved in those sorts of relationships? People who are too young for sexual relationships, but still know where their attractions lie? People who embrace the "wait for marriage" ethic? People who make the decision to be celibate? These people are present in our families and churches now and have strong personal relationships with Jesus. It's a lot easier to deal with people who are seeking to leave a variety of unhelpful behaviours than those who have never been involved in them.

Remember that Dr Weerakoon says about one-third of people with a homosexual orientation will change to a heterosexual orientation and two-thirds will not. We know "reparative therapy" groups around the world are closing, in part because it has become clear many people will not change and it is cruel to offer such a hope.

People of any orientation can be supported to be single where marriage is not an option. However we do such a poor job of supporting single heterosexual people that we (as churches and individuals) need to completely rethink what we do. At least heterosexuals who wish to marry have the hope of some day finding a spouse. What are we offering LGBTI people as an alternative? I imagine this would need two more articles, but I would also like to see discussion of transgender and intersex people.

Renee Skinner
Central Coast

I am horrified at the front cover and article re "Bound", depicting a person wrapped in plastic wrap. Children see these pictures. We are trying to make our young people safe and exclude any plastic bags about. Please think before you compose these stories and photo coverage.

Elaine Beddie

ONLY THE WELL BEHAVED?

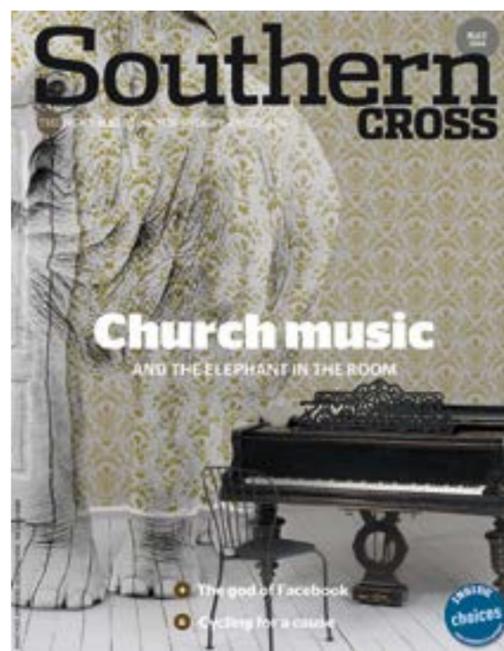
I am writing in response to the statement by Dr Bryan Cowling ("Responding to the Curriculum Review", SC, April) that "Anglican schools are privileged to support students in their identity as creatures of a loving God".

The media recently reported the expulsion of students from an exclusive Anglican school for apparent drug use. This is not the first case of students being expelled from an Anglican school for inappropriate behaviour. These actions bring Dr Cowling's statement into question as actions always speak louder than words.

Are we to assume, after the solution taken by this school, that only well behaved and conformist "creatures of a loving God" have a place in Anglican schools? The "baggage" can be sorted out by the secular public schools. Any Anglican school, more concerned about image, would be far more respected if its attitude reflected Christ and his dealings with society's outcasts.

Anglican school principals, and any judgmental staff or parents, would benefit from reading John 8:3, which reminds us that "he or she who is without sin can throw the first stone". There is also Luke 15:11-32 – the story of the Prodigal Son.

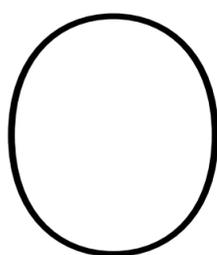
John Cotterill
Kingsford





Bible food

DR GLENN DAVIES



ONE OF THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THOMAS CRANMER WAS THE provision of a systematic reading of the Bible in English at the services of Morning and Evening Prayer. Since these services were held every day of the week, a regular attendee during the course of a year would hear the greater part of the Old Testament, a portion of the Apocrypha, and the New Testament thrice (the gospels and Acts in the morning and the epistles in the evening – although intriguingly only two chapters of Revelation were included). Of course, the book of Psalms would be heard 12 times over, as all 150 psalms were read on a monthly pattern throughout the year.

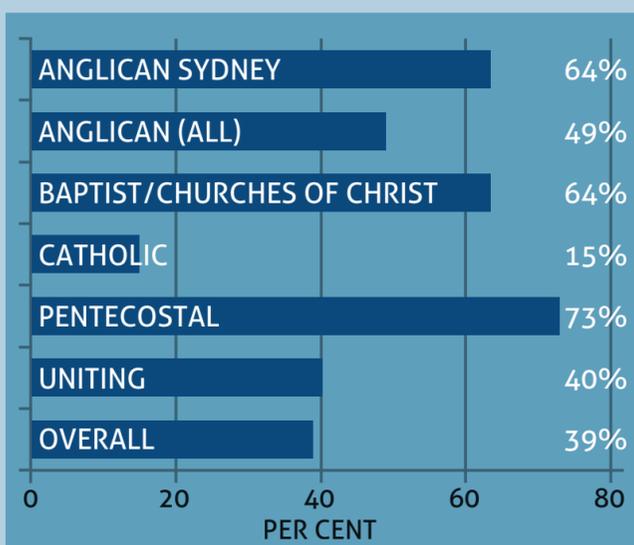
Cranmer's lectionary was an innovation in that he assigned the readings to the calendar days of the year basically in sequential canonical order, rather than using the ecclesiastical year to select his readings. To cater for the latter, he also drew up a series of Proper Lessons for festivals of the Christian calendar. Cranmer's lectionary lasted for more than 300 years until a revision occurred in 1871. This reduced the frequency of reading through the New Testament to twice a year, as the Bible was far more accessible to the average member of the Church of England than it was in the middle of the 16th century.

In 1842 Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a Church of Scotland minister in Dundee, composed a Bible reading calendar for the use of his parishioners in their daily reading of the Bible. It covered the whole of the Old Testament once and the New Testament and Psalms twice in a year. Four readings were set apart for each day, in two columns labelled "family" and "secret" (what we might call "private"), each with a passage from the OT and NT. Though M'Cheyne's brief life was cut short at the age of 30, his legacy of encouraging systematic daily Bible reading lives on.

However, what of our own Bible reading practices? It is no longer our practice to attend Morning and Evening Prayer every day, and even our regular Sunday services on the whole (though there are wonderful exceptions) have fewer readings from Holy Scripture than Cranmer ever envisaged. Maybe our ministers consider that every Christian is reading their Bible on a daily basis, as the faithful Bereans did (Acts 17:11). However, the latest NCLS statistics would indicate otherwise.

Frequent Bible Reading (DAILY / FEW TIMES A WEEK)

SOURCE: 2011 NCLS



Note: NCLS question asked "How often do you read the Bible on your own?"

It is a strange phenomenon that we Sydney Anglicans, who are so devoted to our commitment to the teaching of the Bible, do not appear to be as devoted to our personal reading of the Bible, or at least not as devoted as our forebears or our contemporary Pentecostal brothers and sisters.

In this day and age of apps and aids, we have many resources to help us in a regular Bible reading program for each day. Although it is 15 years since Professor Don Carson published his twin volumes *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Treasures of God's Word*, they still provide an excellent commentary based on the readings of M'Cheyne's plan.

Another more recent product, developed by Anglican Youthworks, is the *Reap Journal*. It comes in graded editions for children, youth and adults. The adult version will take you through the OT once and the NT twice in a year. However, the value of *Reap* is its journal format,

where you are encouraged to interact with the text and meaning of Scripture helping you to apply it to your life, so that reading the Bible is not just a task to be accomplished, but a joy to be experienced, as it feeds your soul and nourishes your Christian life to be more like Christ and to live more for his glory.

If reading Scripture is not your daily habit, is it not time to revise your habits? 'Blessed are they... whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law they meditate day and night' (Psalm 1:1-2). 

MISSION PRAYER

Almighty God,

We call upon you for such an outpouring of your Holy Spirit upon us that we as your people may be assured of your love through your word, seek to please the Saviour in all things, manifest the godly life and be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world.

In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Amen.



Elephant in the music room

Southern CROSS MAY 2014

As every church music director knows, you can't please everybody all the time with the songs you choose. In fact, you usually annoy them all, at least occasionally. Huw Jones considers how a church can find a good balance of songs, with a strong gospel message, that everyone can sing.

“WHY ARE THE SONGS WE SING SOOOO BAD?”
This is a question I've heard a lot over the past 20 years while playing music in my churches. And, admittedly, it's a question I have asked myself at different times.

And it's a hard one to answer. Because, as you may already be thinking, the definition of what is "soooo bad" will tend to differ from person to person. The interpretation and appreciation of music is a thoroughly subjective matter. Even within my own vocational environment of a professional symphony orchestra, my colleagues and I will often differ as to whether we believe a conductor or composer is right or wrong; skilled or unskilled; tasteful or crass; emotive or uninspiring. Yet we are all qualified professionals in the field of music making.

One of my more humorous memories working for three years as a lay minister and music director at St Philip's, York Street, was to see the results of an online survey that we had constructed for our parishioners. About 45 people across our church filled it out, which was not an insignificant proportion of members at the time. I would scroll the Google Doc to the comments regarding music, and find one comment along the lines of "I love the music here! I love the mix of songs. I wouldn't mind some newer songs to contrast the old hymns. 5/5!" Then directly underneath that comment I would see another one like this: "The music here is not good. We do too many new songs. Why don't we do enough hymns? 1/5." It showed me what I'd always suspected – we are not able to please everybody all the time. Seemingly contradictory feedback is always going to be present when it comes to church and church music. That's important to understand when choosing songs.

Despite these subjective opinions, there is often an underlying popular consensus within a group of people who are attempting to achieve the same end (such as an orchestra or a congregation of worshippers). We can't help but agree on most things due to our similar educational backgrounds and musical experiences – and in a church, hopefully theology. To this end, I think it is possible to draw some lines in the sand to define what really is "good" or "bad" (or helpful and unhelpful) in a discussion regarding music.

What I want to debunk from the outset, however, is the idea that within a group of people with a unified purpose we can liberally apply the rule that "What's right for you is right for you; what's right for me is right for me". This idea of pluralism is important for our modern secular society, but can be an over-simplified and easy option to take. However, when a group of people is attempting to achieve a unified aim (such as a congregation of believers singing to exalt and magnify Christ), some consensus needs to be attained with regard to what is "good" and what is "bad".

Having said all that, I also wish to debunk any notion that a strict set of rules can be applied in a catholic manner and somehow work successfully in all contexts. What I wish to outline are concepts that can hopefully be applied no matter what context in which your church finds itself.

Congregational music within churches is often the elephant in the room. Some parishioners spend many years reluctantly singing along, thinking things such as "This is so uninspiring... I would never sing or listen to this kind of music ordinarily... why do we sing the same 10 songs all the time... why are there so many words in this song... why is the melody so hard to sing... why is every song really fast... why do we sing such old songs... why do we sing such new songs... why are the songs too high for my voice..."

More often than not, songs in church will be picked by a minister/staff member who wants to stick to their comfort zone – or by a congregation member who is out of touch with what the majority of their congregation finds edifying. And it is no wonder, really. When people with authority and responsibility have not been taught the purpose of our congregational singing, nor been taught simple concepts of group singing, we shouldn't expect great things to happen.

There may well be a naivety among those in ministry that the elephant in the room. Often people in ministry choosing the songs and constructing the Sunday Communal Worship Service (which I will call the CWS) have been attending church since childhood, always sit in the front few rows, and use church as the central social, vocational and relational sphere of their life. They often do not have many immature Christian friends and even fewer non-Christian friends (and by friends I don't mean the Facebook type).

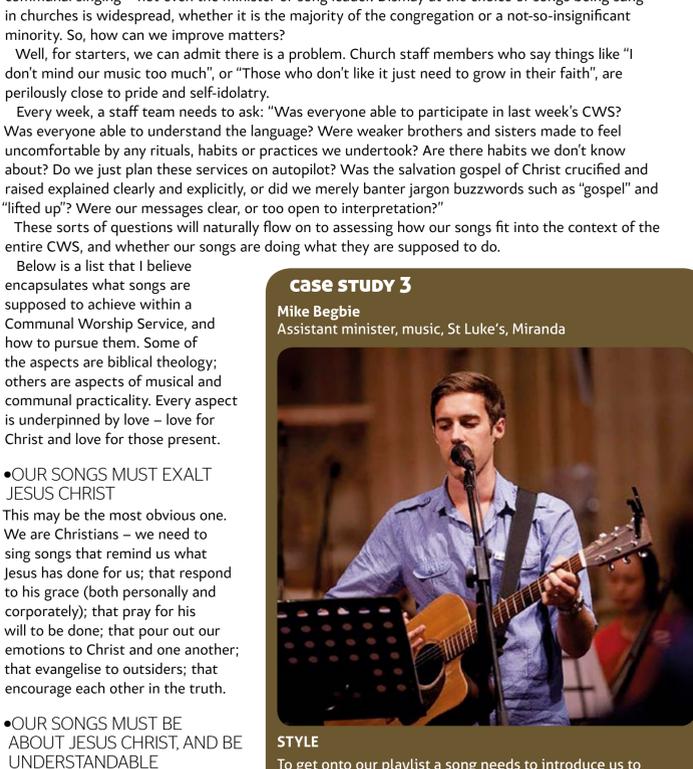
This makes their job difficult, as a fundamental purpose of the CWS is to build up all those present; to speak the gospel clearly; and do everything for the benefit of the "weaker brother" (Romans 14:13:19). This would logically assume that the "stronger brother" (as ministers and their assistants would be categorised) might find aspects of the CWS not entirely to their taste, if they were to always adhere to the rule of "not putting a stumbling block" in the path of the weaker brothers and sisters present.

More often the majority of the congregation (those not in paid ministry, those who are new to faith, those who are non-believers, those who are immature in the faith) end up being the ones bearing the burden for the sake of "building" up the stronger brothers and sisters. The weaker end up suffering for the enjoyment of the stronger.

Singing is often a period in the CWS when this happens. The front few rows (including staff and enthusiasts) are singing with gusto, the song leader is having a great time with eyes closed, but many other people in the room are finding the songs unhelpful. As this significant proportion are taught to follow the lead of the more mature, to aspire to follow their example, they often feel too uncomfortable to approach those front rows to seek out why the singing (or even the CWS) is not helping them.

CASE STUDY 1

Dan op de Veigh
Worship pastor, Church by the Bridge, Kirribilli



STYLE
My main criteria for selecting songs for a particular service is based on theme and tone. Theme: what songs will best help the congregation prepare to hear the word and then respond to the word after it's preached? Tone: what is the appropriate mood that will help people engage emotionally – is it reflective, celebratory, joyful, sorrowful, repentant?

SINGABILITY
I think the key and range of songs are really important to consider because the songs that we sing in church should be beautiful and at the same time accessible to many different kinds of people. We often transpose songs out of the recorded key to make them more accessible to the congregation. I also try as much as possible to roster on both a male and female singer to lead the congregation. The range of certain songs mean they lend themselves to a male voice over a female voice or vice versa. As long as there is a reasonable balance between the two in any given set or service then that can be a good solution to the challenge of keeping the beauty of a particular song while maintaining accessibility.

NEW SONGS
I aim for an average of something like one new song every month. The sets will usually look quite different each week, pulling from a repertoire of around 60 songs. I try and achieve a balance each week between well-known songs and newer songs. Well-known songs will get used about every 6-8 weeks.

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CASE STUDY 2

Greg Cooper
Music director, Christ Church, St Ives

STYLE
We are keen for each congregation to have a musical "centre" – a style and songbook that serves the congregation well, and that is reflective of their demographic. We try things out – some things work, some things don't. Dialogue with our congregations on these issues is very helpful, too. The balance of music each week will depend on the themes being addressed in the sermon and the thematic and emotional flow of the service.

SINGABILITY
There is a certain melodic range that a congregation will feel comfortable and confident singing in – and beyond that, people will find it uncomfortable. We want singing to aid the proclamation of God's word, and reflection upon it (Colossians 3:16). It is quite common for us to consider introducing a new song with great lyrics and a strong melody, only to find that the melody, in fact, goes beyond the comfortable congregational melodic range – so we don't introduce it. I certainly believe in challenging the congregation musically – and our congregations enjoy being challenged musically, too. Varying song arrangements is a great way to do this.

NEW SONGS
We aim to introduce a new song every month at each of our services. That new song will be sung three times in that month. At any given time, we have about 40 songs on the song list for each of our services so there can be variety from week to week, but also a sense of there being a "congregational songbook" that provides familiarity, consistency and unity in our singing together. As new songs are introduced and other songs are rested, the song list for each service changes incrementally.

Churches have fallen into behaviours that make church most enjoyable for those who contribute to it most. Or, to crystallise possible motives further: "We make church most enjoyable for those whose opinions we value most". At the end of the day, this boils down to an issue of pride and self-idolatry.

If that sounds like a strong kick in the guts, I'm afraid to say the scenario can sometimes be worse. It is not uncommon in some churches that virtually everybody doesn't enjoy the congregational singing. I have been blessed to be a member at churches where this is not the case, but while travelling or touring I have attended churches in which not a single person appears to be encouraged by the communal singing – not even the minister or song leader. Dismay at the choice of songs being sung in churches is widespread, whether it is the majority of the congregation or a not-so-insignificant minority. So, how can we improve matters?

Well, for starters, we can admit there is a problem. Like church members who say things like "I don't mind our music, too much", or "Those who don't like it just need to grow in their faith", are perilously close to pride and self-idolatry.

Every week, a staff team needs to ask: "Was everyone able to participate in last week's CWS? Was everyone able to understand the language? Were weaker brothers and sisters made to feel uncomfortable by any rituals, habits or practices we undertook? Are there habits we don't know about? Do we just plan these services on autopilot? Was the salvation gospel of Christ crucified and raised explained clearly and explicitly, or did we merely banter jargon buzzwords such as "gospel" and "lifted up"? Were our messages clear, or too open to interpretation?"

These sorts of questions will naturally flow on to assessing how our songs fit into the context of the entire CWS, and whether our songs are doing what they are supposed to do.

Below is a list that I believe encapsulates what songs are supposed to achieve within a Communal Worship Service, and how to pursue them. Some of the aspects are biblical theology; others are aspects of musical and communal practicality. Every aspect is underpinned by love – love for Christ and love for those present.

●OUR SONGS MUST EXALT JESUS CHRIST
This may be the most obvious one. We are Christians – we need to sing songs that remind us what Jesus has done for us; that respond to his grace (both personally and corporately); that pray for his will to be done; that pour out our emotions to Christ and one another; that evangelise to outsiders; that encourage each other in the truth.

●OUR SONGS MUST BE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, AND BE UNDERSTANDABLE
Our songs need to be about Jesus: not just in the mind of a Christian in a Christian context, but to anyone who may hear it. If our songs are vague, then people can place any meaning they wish into the song and fall into the sin of idolatry. If the songs are too technical or jargonised in their language, then there will be those present who do not understand their message.

●OUR SONGS NEED TO BE EXPLICIT, YET SIMPLE
This relates to the previous point. While making our songs explicitly about Jesus Christ, they need to be simple enough to be sung by both weak and strong, and simple enough to be understood by both weak and strong. I would also add that songs need to be simple (or well constructed) enough to allow people the time and space to comprehend the simplicity in a song includes lyrical simplicity, melodic simplicity and rhyhmic simplicity. Can the song be sung by unmusical people? Can it be sung by people who speak English as a second language? Are there enough lyrics to comprehend Christ, but not so many lyrics that we cannot emotionally engage with the truths?

●OUR SONGS NEED TO BE THE RIGHT TEMPO
I would assert this is the biggest hurdle in congregational singing. Generally speaking, non-professional musicians (and even professional ones) play sing-along songs too fast. Musicians also speed up to a tempo they find comfortable to play, but which is often less comfortable for those singing. This choice completely changes how people both understand and respond to a song. It is a good practice for church musicians to try to "hold back" their tempo and allow people the time and space to sing lyrics in a relaxed and appropriate speed. If you have good recordings of the song, try to play along with them. Or if there are metronome markings, use a metronome at rehearsals.

●OUR SONGS NEED TO BE IN THE RIGHT KEY
This one is for the musicians. You must remember that men and women have different vocal ranges, and within that there are few who can sing as well or as broadly as the song leaders. An average man will generally be able to sing A2-D#4; an average woman will be able to sing G3-C5. Your song leaders will have bigger ranges than this. A safe vocal range to use in a service would be A-D, within the appropriate octave for each gender. You can push it up to D# for brief moments and people won't tend to mind.

This vocal range is probably going to be different, or more narrow, than the recordings you hear of famous Christian songwriters singing their songs, or of a megachurch singing in rock-concert style in an auditorium of thousands. However, like all considerations, the right motives need to be employed. Is the key and range of a song most helpful to all those present (women, men, children, musical, unmusical, Christian, non-Christian, educated, all simple, local, tourist)?

●OUR SONGS AND SERVICES NEED SPACE
Sometimes a CWS feels like a mad attempt to get through as many activities as possible; or just get through a few of them as quickly as possible. Our songs can feel similar – after a slightly awkward pause – "Please be seated".

This isn't the most effective way to engage parishioners with the wonderful truths in the songs. I prefer to pick songs that have maybe one main idea; that perhaps repeat an idea lyrically and musically; that have space either within the song or after the song for people to dwell on the truths just sung; that are simple enough to remember the vast majority of the words (if not all the words); that have plenty of opportunities to breathe and do not feel rushed.

A good song leader can direct a congregation to breathe and find that sort of reflection and magnify the truths of Christ with well-chosen exhortations or prayers after a song. A prayer that helps express the emotion of those gathered, that is communal and not personal or self-focused, can be a very edifying way for parishioners to be engaged with what they are singing and focused on who they are worshipping. Done skillfully, well-informed leading can help smooth out edges between songs and other activities, ensuring people don't feel jolted out of the profound and into the banal.

●OUR SONGS NEED TO BE FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES
Sourcing songs exclusively from one label (like Hillsong, Emu, Sovereign Grace, Worship Central or Chris Tomlin) will only create "staleness" in your congregation as it begins to become aware (perhaps subconsciously) that all the songs seem to follow the same formulas. It may also alienate people in your congregation who do not respond to that particular brand of music.

While it's not possible to please everybody all the time, I would assert that it is possible to please the vast majority most of the time. This is chiefly done through variety. Some will want older hymns with poetic imagery, others will want simple choruses with repeated exhortations, others will like fast and energetic, others will like slow and meditative. It is important to explore the vast world of Christian songwriting and find what songs would work best for your particular parishioners.

Given the multicultural and varied nature of our nation and church services, it's important we sing songs of different styles and sources. Be wary of basing your song choices on the cultural background of your ministers or elders, as these tend to be quite different to those of the parishioners. Seek the wisdom of a variety of people such as ministers, elders, new members, members from non-English speaking backgrounds, Bible study friends and the music team. You'll get a much clearer picture of how things really are. And remember, you won't please everybody all the time.

Huw Jones raised in a Christian family in Sydney and went on to study music at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the Royal College of Music, London. He was Director of Music at Sydney's St Philip's York Street from 2010-2013. Huw and his family now live in Brisbane, where he works as Principal Oboist in the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. Huw will be teaching a Music Director Seminar at TWIST conference Brisbane in May.

CASE STUDY 3

Mike Begbie
Assistant manager, music, St Luke's, Miranda

STYLE
To get onto our playlist a song needs to introduce us to something we are not already singing about or introduce us to a fresh take on something we are already singing about. We also add in songs of varying tempos each term which means we don't end up singing only in one tempo range.

SINGABILITY
One of the goals of singing in church is that our God is praised by his people's singing and so if our bands can't play a song or our congregations can't sing a song then we won't touch it because we won't achieve this goal. Sometimes tapping will help but I've found with lots of new songs, particularly songs with an octave jump written in, that in rearranging it you lose too much of the songs power and flavour. I'm happy to stretch people but the reality is that there's only a certain range most people can sing in so we have to stay in that range if we want people to sing God's praise.

NEW SONGS
We have a list of about 30 songs we build our rosters from each term which means that we'll sing most songs twice and new songs 4-5 times each term. Within that 30, 3-4 are new songs which will replace 3-4 songs we need to retire and there are always some hymns on that list.

I think this is one of Rob Smith's best. It is a prayer that the Spirit of God would fill our lives, enabling us to strive for holy and pleasing worship, asking God to cleanse our sins and lift us up. The imagery is from a range of biblical references, and the song crescendos to an uplifting chorus. Who says nothing good came out of the '90s?

This is amazing grace
Josh Farro, Phil Wickham, Jeremy Riddle, 2012
Congregation key – E-flat major

This has a simple and repetitive tune, bringing together Christ's sacrifice and kingship. "Worthy is the King who conquered the grave". Bethel's other music is worth a listen.

You alone can rescue
Matt Redman & Jonas Myrin, 2009
Congregation key – B-flat major

A simple praise to God for his rescue of fallen people. It begins with the psalm-like question "Who, O Lord, could save themselves, their own soul could hold?" It has an easy tune and, while not outlining Jesus' atonement on the cross (which I hope would appear in other aspects of your CWS), includes God's gracious mercy and our appropriate response.

You are my king
Billy James Foote, 1997
Congregation key – D major

I don't think there is a contemporary church song that explains the gospel so simply. I think it would be impossible for someone to walk away from your church not understanding what Jesus had done on the cross after this seemingly plain song.

I stand amazed
Charles H. Gabriel, 1957
Congregation key – F major

The first, fourth and fifth verses are the best ones to sing of this old hymn. The song (as the title implies) simply conveys our awe and wonder at the love of God that he would suffer and die for us sinners, and a pledge to sing of his love through the ages in the heavenly gathering. Chris Tomlin recorded a good version of this hymn in 2006.

In Christ alone
Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, 2001
Congregation key – D major

This has become a worldwide classic due to its memorable Irish-style melody and comprehensive gospel theology. Each verse has a rousing high point and aptly paints in words the good news of God incarnate, crucified, raised and glorified.

Lead me to the cross
Brooke Ligertwood, 2006
Congregation key – B minor

Brooke Ligertwood (better known as Brooke Fraser) is one of the most poetic and talented of Hillsong United's songwriting team. The song is a prayer of few words, that we would have our souls quieted to comprehend the profundity of the cross where God's love was poured out. I think too often we forget to ask God to lead us as we seek his will and his heart. The melody may not be quite as simple as others, but it is very akin to popular music from the past 20 years and in this respect has widespread popularity.

New song in my heart
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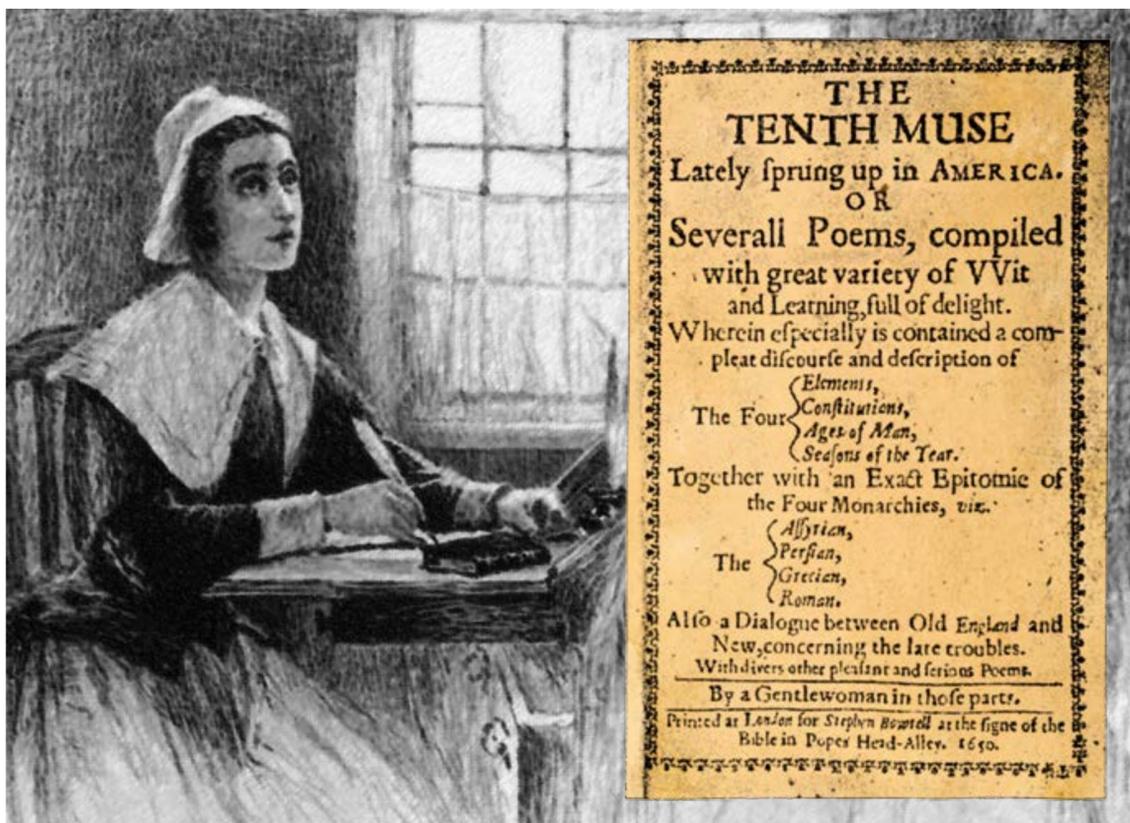
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Hold lightly to this world

In a materialistic, self-centred world, we can be encouraged by the lives and faith of those who have gone before us, writes JANE TOOHER.

GOD HAS GIVEN US MANY CHRISTIAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS THROUGHOUT history whom we can – and do – benefit from. They teach, challenge and comfort us largely through their ministry of writing, which lives on many years after they have died. These writings include books, sermons, tracts, songs, letters and poetry. Many of these men and women are well known, but others less so. One of our lesser-known sisters is Anne Bradstreet.

Born Anne Dudley in Northampton, England in 1612, she was raised by Puritan parents and was a Puritan by her own conviction, frustrated that reforms in the church did not go far enough. While she was still young her father began working as a steward for the Earl of Lincoln and this gave Anne access to books and an education that would shape the rest of her life and ministries. She was tutored in literature, history, Greek, Latin, French and Hebrew.

At the age of 16 Anne married Simon Bradstreet, a fellow Puritan. With Simon, her parents and others of a similar theological persuasion, she left her comfortable home and sailed to America on the ship *Arbella* in 1630. Not everyone survived the three-month voyage, and once they landed their lives were still at risk. During their first harsh winter in the country, spent in the Salem area, one in five of the new settlers died. This meant the family soon relocated to Charlestown and, not long after, they moved again to help found the city of Boston (NB. Anne's husband and father were influential in founding Harvard University in 1636. In 1997 Harvard dedicated one of its gates, the Bradstreet Gate, to Anne as she was the first poet to be published in America).

It is hard to imagine what it would have been like for Anne in those early days: still a teenager, newly married and trying to make a home in a new colony. Although a member of a privileged family, her new surrounds would have been in stark contrast to her upbringing. But we do have a window into her thought when she begins to write poetry, and it's her poems that can minister to us today. In her poetry Anne combines – to great effect – her education, her clear theological framework and her biblical knowledge.

In 1650 Anne became the first female poet to be published in England, and also the first poet to be published in the British Northern American Colonies. Her poems reflect the fact that she, like other Puritans, was clear about why God had placed her on this earth, what her roles were, and that ultimately life was all about getting ready to die. But this was not a morbid view, robbing her days of joy and other emotions. Her poems reflect a realistic view of life. They are rich in the variety of emotions we face as humans this side of heaven but they are ultimately God-centred and help us fix our eyes on where our true home is as Christians. This is why they can be so helpful for us today.

The epitaph Anne wrote for her mother, Dorothy Dudley, who died in 1643, reflects that Dorothy embodied a Puritan understanding of what a godly woman should be, which was also Anne's belief:

A worthy Matron of unspotted life,
A loving Mother and obedient wife,
A friendly Neighbor, pitiful to poor,
Whom oft she fed, and clothed with her store;
To Servants wisely awful, but yet kind,
And as they did, so they reward did find:
A true Instructor of her Family,

The which she ordered with dexterity.
The publick meetings ever did frequent,
And in her Closet constant hours she spent;
Religious in all her words and wayes,
Preparing still for death, till end of dayes:
Of all her Children, Children, liv'd to see,
Then dying, left a blessed memory.

Some weren't convinced that a woman should be publishing poetry. Anne, however, had no problems holding together a Puritan view of womanhood (being submissive to her husband, loving toward her children, generous to her neighbours, clear on the ordered boundaries of society, recognising that servants are servants but being gentle and kind to them), alongside actively making a positive and intelligent contribution to her community. She was comfortable being a godly woman and a published poet.

This, I think, highlights both Anne's knowledge of God's word and her practical wisdom. It is also a helpful correction for those of us who don't identify as Puritans and may have a tendency to caricature them. It is simply not true to say their lives were a joyless submission to legalism and stereotypical roles. It is not true that their women could not think for themselves. Similarly today, it is all too easy for those who label some Sydney Anglicans as "puritans" to caricature women within the Diocese who hold to a conservative understanding of the roles of women on biblical grounds as unable to think for themselves, or not capable of coming to a careful and reasoned position on the issues.

Anne and Simon survived the dangers of living in frontier settings and their eight children all survived infancy, however the second half of the 1660s was a tragic time. Between 1665 and 1669 three of their young grandchildren died, as well as one of their daughters-in-law, and the family home was also destroyed by fire.

Much of Anne's poetry flows out of what is happening at home and in her extended familial relationships. She wrote poems about these difficult events that remind us now of the need to "sit loose to the world", as one writer puts it, and look to God for our hope and comfort.

We can see examples of this in these excerpts from the poem she wrote after the burning of her house:

I starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To straighten me in my Distress
And not to leave me succourless.
Then coming out, behold a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.
And when I could no longer look,
I blest his grace that gave and took,
That laid my goods now in the dust.
Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.

It was his own; it was not mine.
Far be it that I should repine,
He might of all justly bereft
But yet sufficient for us left.
When by the Ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sate and long did lie.
Here stood that Trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best...

And later she notes:

Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide:
And did thy wealth on earth abide,
Didst fix thy hope on mouldring dust,
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.
Thou hast a house on high erect
Fram'd by that mighty Architect,
With glory richly furnish'd

Stands permanent, though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by his gift is made thine own.
There's wealth enough; I need no more.
Farewell, my self; farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love;
My hope and Treasure lies above.

On the death of her month-old grandson Simon she wrote tenderly that he had

No sooner come, but gone, and fal'n asleep,
Acquaintance short, yet parting caus'd us weep,
Three flours, two scarcely blown, the last i'th' bud,
Cropt by th'Almighties hand; yet is he good,
With dreadful awe before him let's be mute,
Such was his will, but why, let's not dispute,

With humble hearts and mouths put in the dust,
Let's say he's merciful as well as just.
He will return, and make up all our losses,
And smile again, after our bitter crosses.
Go pretty babe, go rest with Sisters twain
Among the blest in endless joyes remain.

Our God has been merciful and kind in giving us Christian brothers and sisters with a variety of gifts that we benefit from in many ways – and with some we can benefit long after they have died. The gift of poetry he gave Anne Bradstreet can help many in the church have a God-centred view of life. Her words help lift our eyes beyond our current circumstances to our true home. ☪

Anne Bradstreet wrote more than 50 poems. These can be found online or in *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*, edited by J. Hensley.

Jane Toohar is director of the Priscilla and Aquila Centre at Moore College, which encourages the ministries of women in partnership with men.

ST ANDREW'S EASTER FOR ROYALS



Archbishop Glenn Davies and Dean Phillip Jensen welcome the Duke and Duchess to St Andrew's Cathedral. PHOTO: Ramon Williams

The service was child-friendly with plenty of babies, a Sunday school performance and young choristers, but baby George was not with the Royal couple at St Andrew's Cathedral on Easter Day.

In what was essentially a private Easter visit to church, members of the media were not allowed inside the Cathedral but waited with the thousands of people outside for a glimpse of the Royal couple.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott arrived minutes before the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, who were met by Archbishop Glenn Davies and the Dean of Sydney, Phillip Jensen.

Once inside, at the couple's request, they saw not a special Royal service, but a regular Easter Sunday celebration complete with babies going into and out of the crying room, the Sunday school-performing songwriter Colin Buchanan's "He died upon the cross" and a dramatic reading by members of the St Andrew's youth group.



Above: The Duchess meets Sunday school children (left) and the Dukes talks with choir members. PHOTOS: Auspic

Below: Laurel and Justin Moffatt show the signatures in the First Fleet Bible and prayer book. PHOTO: Ramon Williams

The Cathedral choir, with the youngest member just seven, sang Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus and led the hymn singing.

Archbishop Glenn Davies spoke on the raising of Lazarus and compared the miracle with Jesus' own death and resurrection.

"I've often wondered what it would have been like to have gone to the second funeral of Lazarus," the Archbishop said. "Imagine what kind of joy there would have been at that funeral. The mournful tears and yes, the loss of a brother, but knowing that he would rise again and knowing for a certainty, for a surety, because he had already re-enacted a rising back into this world. But now that Jesus has risen from the dead what a glory it is, what a perfection, what a wonder, what a miracle of salvation."

After the service, the Duke and Duchess added their signatures to the Royal family members who have signed the First Fleet Bible and prayer book, carried by chaplain Richard Johnson in 1788 and kept in a museum in St Philip's, York Street.

After speaking to the members of the choir and Sunday school, the Royal couple left for a Taronga Zoo tour, along with baby George.



THEY'RE OFF AT ORAN PARK!



Breaking new ground: (from left) Geoff Kyngdon, chairman, Mission Property Committee; Mark Perich, Greenfields Development Corporation; Peter Hayward, Bishop of Wollongong; Stuart Starr, senior pastor, New Life Anglican Church Oran Park; Pieter van Zwieten, Reitsma Constructions. PHOTO: Scott Lincoln

The suburb of Oran Park was once known only for its speedway, which disturbed the tranquility of the surrounding farmland.

Today it is one of Sydney's newest satellite towns with housing for 25,000 people and serving a larger local area.

The Oran Park area was identified as a ministry priority 10 years ago in a strategic report of the Mission Property Committee, and so work began on planning an Anglican school and ministry centre.

Oran Park Anglican College was built first and opened in Term 1, 2012. It currently caters for students from prep to Year 7.

Last month, the years of planning led to a ceremonial "turning of the sod" as work commenced on the New Life Anglican Church Oran Park. The first stage of the building will feature a 250-seat auditorium, associated breakout area and foyer space, children's meeting rooms, kitchen and amenities as well as car parking.

Early planning means the church, like Oran Park Anglican College, is in the centre of the town. The church, planted two years ago, has grown to more than 80 adults and children, and it was granted provisional parish status this year. After meeting first in the college and now in Oran Park Public School, the church will be ready to occupy its new building on schedule in March 2015.

History in black and white

JUDY ADAMSON

Belle
Rated PG

THE YEAR IS 1769 AND CAPTAIN JOHN LINDSAY TAKES HIS LITTLE DAUGHTER TO LIVE with his uncle, as he is in the navy and unable to look after the girl now her mother is dead.

It could be the start of any old period drama. But if you add into the mix that Captain Lindsay is an aristocrat, his uncle is Lord Mansfield – the Lord Chief Justice of England – and the girl is an illegitimate, mixed-race child at a time when slavery was legal and England one of the world's biggest traders in human beings... well, the landscape changes.

Oh, and it's a true story.

Today, in Kenwood House on London's Hampstead Heath, hangs a portrait taken in 1779 of Lady Elizabeth Murray and her cousin, Dido Elizabeth Belle Lindsay. Both are dressed in silk, Dido is wearing pearls, and Lady Elizabeth is gently touching her cousin's arm. They are presented as equals in station yet Dido is dark skinned – at a time when to be “negro” invited automatic, and accepted, racism and rejection.

Kenwood House is where the girls grew up, and both were adopted by Lord Mansfield and his wife. While history doesn't tell us whether the Mansfields initially took Dido in out of duty, it is clear from their subsequent actions that they came to love her as their own.

But her arrival – historically and on film – places them in a quandary. Lord Mansfield (Tom Wilkinson) is initially horrified, thinking of his legal position and the awkwardness of his nephew's request to raise Dido as befits her bloodline. Captain Lindsay replies that, “What is right can never be impossible”.

Later, as Lady Mansfield (Emily Watson) watches the young Dido play with her cousin Elizabeth, she worries over the difficulties that lie ahead. Marriage for a mixed-race girl into their class will be impossible, she reasons, but then who will look after her once they are gone?

So begins a journey into the social mores, prejudices and history of late 18th-century England through the eyes of Dido (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), as she seeks – like all young people – to understand who she is, what life means and where she fits into the world.

For Dido these questions are very pointed. Yes, she is the daughter of an aristocrat but she is also the daughter of a West Indian woman, possibly a slave. Can she recognise both at once, or should she wish away one for the sake of the other? Can she be educated and accomplished and also sheltered from the realities of life for other dark-skinned people? And is it acceptable to be a loved part of the Mansfield family and yet, painfully, separate?

“How may I be too high in rank to dine with the servants yet too low to dine with my family?” she asks, struggling to balance her feelings against accepted social custom. There are plenty of such issues to explore here, but the filmmakers have rounded the story out with a dash of Jane Austen matchmaking and a substantial piece of history.

First is the historical fact that, while Dido was cared for under Lord Mansfield's roof, he was required to rule in the case of the Zong slave ship – where the owners had thrown many slaves overboard to drown and then claimed insurance for loss of income. Had the ship run low on water as they claimed, or were they exploiting the law and reducing human beings to cargo?

Second, Dido becomes close to Lord Mansfield's legal student, John Davinier (Sam Reid) – who is a passionate advocate for the disenfranchised, including slaves, but is not of the upper class. In addition, normal expectations of wealth are turned on their heads when Dido is left an inheritance by her father and is thus independent and, potentially, a good catch. Her cousin Elizabeth (Sarah Gadon), however, is cut out of her father's will and left virtually penniless.

So, Dido has an unexpected chance to marry into the class she has been brought up in, but at the same time she enters an emotional minefield. Will she be truly embraced by society or merely tolerated for her family and wealth? And if she is only tolerated, is that enough?

While Lord Mansfield balances the value of lives against livelihoods as he considers evidence and the law in the Zong case, Dido wrangles with the value of family, position, love and humanity.

You could say that the film doesn't really take you anywhere that has not been covered before in period drama. There is an inevitability to some plotlines – you know who Dido will love and you know who will let her down and why. The pace is also sedate rather than snappy, which may irritate those unwilling to be moved by the story. Yet the fact that such a tale exists in history at all is extraordinary, and it deserves to be told. The choices made by the real-life figures are compelling and, in at least one case, changed the course of history.

Yes, events are presented by the writers in too much of a black-and-white manner (for want of a better way of putting it). A little more subtlety in many of the characters would be a plus, but the performances are first-rate and the costumes and settings exquisite.

Belle isn't a world-beater like *12 Years A Slave*, but it's definitely worth a look.

The god of Facebook



SARAH COLYER

WHY CRY OUT TO GOD WHEN YOU CAN CRY OUT TO FACEBOOK? THE question might sound ridiculous to most Christians – until you stop to look at their Facebook walls. On the whole, churchgoers seem to post more proactively than non-believers about their weekly frustrations and small triumphs.

We pour out our hearts to Facebook the way our forebears would try God's ear in times of trouble. I doubt many of the psalms would have been written if Mark Zuckerberg lived about 3000 years earlier. Surely after a few bouts of “How long, O Lord” King David would have turned to his friends (and frenemies) online.

Just tonight while wallowing in self-pity over the breakdown of a precious friendship I picked up my smart phone, fiddled at the keypad, deleted, fiddled again, deleted and then put the phone down. Who would hear? And even then, who would care?

Facebook offers the immediacy of a response that we don't often get when we pray. The response is quantifiable – how many likes, how many comments, even how many people say they will pray for me? That's what makes it so addictive. Yet I have never found a session on Facebook brings the same feeling of a weight being lifted from my shoulders as I have felt after casting my anxieties on the Lord.

The reverse happens. After typing something sensitive on Facebook my mind replays over and over every word I wrote, and every comment written in response. I feel compelled to keep checking my phone to see if anyone else has posted anything – even though it might be someone I haven't seen in a decade who I don't even like.

If I go into my room, close the door and pray quietly, my husband might notice. But if I post online, even though I may be sitting in my study listening to the crickets, I get a crowd of people commenting. Then again, do any of them really care?

Don't tell me you care. That's really not helpful. To be honest, I'm not even sure “who” it is exactly that I want to read my stuff on Facebook. If I just wanted a few close friends to know, I could pick up the phone and call them. But there's something ethereal about Facebook. It's as if it becomes the “someone” out there for whom my soul aches. Where is the internet, after all? Maybe it's in heaven? Of course none of us believe that – but then how do we explain the way we act?

Perhaps we have stopped crying out to God because we don't think he's responding. Surely we have all felt this way – not least of all King David. A sample of the psalmist's first lines clearly enough: Why Lord, do you stand far off? Answer me when I call to you! Hear me Lord! My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

These last words, of course, were echoed by Jesus himself while he was hanging on the cross. And therein lies the answer to the question of why we should bother crying out to Lord. Not only does God hear and care, he has power over the tragedies of sin and death that drive me, powerless, to the emptiness of the internet.

Why would I post on Facebook when I can pray?

Comedian's laughter through tears



NICK GILBERT

HANNAH BOLAND HAS A WAY WITH WORDS. AN AUTHOR OF THREE BOOKS, A PUBLIC speaker, poetry writer and jazz performer, she is now taking her grab bag of talents on the road in NSW and Victoria with a stand-up comedy and storytelling show. Apart from all that, she also enjoys a good chat.

“It's not called Gift of the Gab for nothing,” she jokes about her show.

What is interesting about Boland, however, is that much of her desire to make people laugh comes from her own grief and sorrows. She and her husband Michael have two living children, and the family attends Mittagong Anglican Church, but they have also had to deal with the grief of one child being stillborn and another being born with a severe brain abnormality that meant he only survived for 47 hours after birth.

“At the start of last year, when we lost our second baby, I had a nervous breakdown with severe depression and anxiety,” Boland says. “One of the things that happens when you can't do something like that is you lose any hope or interest in the future. You just can't see your life from that point forward – that was my experience, anyway. As I started to very slowly come out of that big hole, for the first time in months I asked myself the question: ‘If there was anything I could do in the whole world, what would it be?’ As soon as that came into my head, the answer came as well, which was to become a stand-up comedian and use that to share the truth about Jesus with people.”

Boland had spoken at church events and conferences before, but was not sure whether this was what God wanted for her. She had prayed with her husband and mother about it, but one of the last little prods came from an unlikely source.

“I'm not a big believer in special signs and coincidences and all of that,” she says, “but I couldn't ignore this one. We sponsor a child through Compassion, he's in Indonesia, and there's about a two or three-month lag between letters. We got a letter from him the next day after talking to my mum [about going into comedy], and on the back of the letters they've got a section for the kids to draw pictures. On the back, I turned it over and nearly fell over myself. It wasn't related to anything else he'd written in the letter, but he had drawn a picture of a microphone on a stand with the words ‘stand-up comedy’ in big letters on the back. It was pretty amazing.”

Boland's tour has now begun, taking in NSW regional centres and the Sydney metropolitan area, and is running in a fairly leisurely way from now until September.

“It's spread out in the way it is because I do have two young kids,” she says. “I'm trying not to be away for more than two nights at a time and not every weekend in a row. It's a huge leap of faith, but we went with it because we thought it represented the best impact compared to the amount of effort we wanted to put in.”

Her routine is a collection of different styles of comedy, but she says the focus is not simply humour for humour's sake. Instead, she wants to encourage and share stories.

“I suppose everyone's going to have a good hand-raising-in-church joke there somewhere,” she laughs. “It's a bit like trying to reinvent the wheel: ‘Now, how can I do another kind of hand-raising joke?’”

“In all seriousness, my show has a little bit of that, but I tried not to make that the focus. The focus for this show is storytelling, with stories from my life, a bit of observational humour. I write poems, so have some humorous poetry along the lines of Adrian Plass or Pam Ayres... I also do a musical set at the end as well. I'm pretty excited about performing it, really.”

When asked about how one treads the line of being a Christian comedian who is family friendly and edifying, while also being insightful and original, her answer is that she tries to be open about her own struggles and weakness, and to be clear her humour comes from that kind of heart.

“Comedy does need to have that element of truth but the thing is, when you have that truth, it's almost inevitable someone will be offended,” she says. “My husband and I have prayed a lot about the content of what I talk about. Our aim is never to set out to offend people. The line for me might be different to the line for you, so I try to be sensitive to that and rely on God to show me what needs to go and what can stay.”

Boland cites the likes of Spike Milligan as among her influences – a man known for his lifelong battle with bipolar disorder and deep depression. She says she wants her comedy to give others a respite from life's struggles.

“Having a laugh won't change your circumstances or actually fix anything, but it can give you relief and remind you of other things,” she says.

“Paul says in 2 Corinthians that his power is made perfect in our weakness. I have just learnt the utter truth of that statement, because when you're shattered and broken, and you have nothing left, it really is up to God to hold you and bring you ultimately through that. There's literally nothing you can do yourself. Seeing him do that time and time again, that's what I cling to, and I wait on him.”

For information on Hannah Boland's *Gift of the Gab* tour, see www.hannahboland.com.au