

Southern Cross

SEPT
EMBER
2014

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY



Healed?

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- + The dangers of digital church
- & *Living With The Enemy*



COVER
We look at healing for the heart and the soul. P11

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“ I wanted to be loving to someone I was in profound disagreement with, ”



David Ould
Culture

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Legal aid



From left: Penelope Barletta, Keith Mason, Robert Forsyth and Edward Vaughan at the St John's Legal Centre celebration.

JUDY ADAMSON

IT'S ALTRUISTIC, WAS FOUNDED BY A LOCAL ANGLICAN CHURCH MORE THAN 20 YEARS AGO, and helps those who can't help themselves. But you've probably never heard of it.

The St John's Legal Centre, started in the early 1990s by the then rector of St John's, Darlinghurst, the Rev Dr Bill Lawton, has a long history of providing free legal advice to those on the margins of society. For the past few years the centre has also been sponsored by one of the largest law firms in the world – K & L Gates, which was founded by Bill Gates' father and uncle.

Yet the current rector of St John's, the Rev Edward Vaughan, is pretty sure most Sydney Anglicans don't even know the centre exists.

"This came up a while ago when we sought to employ a principal solicitor," he says. "We didn't get any Christians applying for the role. We advertised in *Southern Cross* and other Christian media and got no response, which really surprised me. That was when I began to realise we needed to let people know more about this place."

Mr Vaughan says that while there are much larger community legal services in Sydney, the work done by the St John's Legal Centre is usually linked to people at the church's Rough Edges café, which is run to provide a safe haven for street people.

"We don't do court appearances – if there's need for a court appearance, we refer them to Legal Aid," he explains. "But we give advice, write letters and those sorts of things."

"It's important because the kind of people we deal with at Rough Edges often have issues with literacy. So a lot of the time it's about negotiation with institutions – bill repayments, payment of fines – the kind of letters we would write without thinking about it. But some people need a lot of help with that kind of thing."

Earlier in the year the church held a celebration to acknowledge its continuing partnership with K & L Gates, which provides funds for the centre to employ a principal solicitor, and also provides *pro bono* solicitors and legal volunteers.

"They have a very strong philanthropic arm around the world and they've been very supportive," Mr Vaughan says. "So we just wanted to celebrate that relationship – and remind people that we're here!"

» The spirit of the law: see Keith Mason's essay, page 7

Land swoop in south-west "gateway"



New acquisition (left to right): Tony Willis, assistant to the Bishop of Wollongong, Geoff Kyngdon, chairman of MPC and Peter Hayward, Bishop of Wollongong, stand at the entrance to 30 Heath Road in Leppington.

AFTER A TWO-YEAR SEARCH FOR LAND IN ONE OF SYDNEY'S LARGEST GROWTH CORRIDORS, THE Mission Property Committee (MPC) has bought a two-hectare site in the south-western suburb of Leppington. The MPC is charged with acquiring land in "greenfields" or developing areas, funded by all parishes in the Diocese. Leppington was targeted because it is one of the gateways of the new South-West Growth Centre. It has a railway station – part of the South-West Rail Link – due to open in 2015 and a forecast population growth of more than 50,000 people in the next two decades.

The Leppington site, on Heath Road, cost \$2.75 million but has sufficient land area for a new ministry centre and car park, as well as room for future expansion.

MPC chairman Geoff Kyngdon says that "as an added bonus, the site already has a large house with multiple meeting rooms and an outbuilding that could prove very useful in the short term".

The MPC plans to seek approval for use of the existing residence as an interim Anglican ministry centre. This could be used over the next five years to establish the church and, as funds become available, a ministry centre could be constructed. The committee has also bought a block in the adjoining East Leppington residential release area where a church planter, set to commence in 2016, could be housed.

"To suggest things are exploding before our very eyes in Leppington is to put it mildly, and Heath Road is an excellent example of why we need to get in early in developing areas such as this," Mr Kyngdon says. "I wonder what the monetary value of the site will be in five years, but of far greater importance is having a bridgehead for the gospel in an area as it develops; even better, a site that could be used for ministry with little fuss from day one."

It is estimated that there will be rapid population growth of more than 600,000 people on the fringes of metropolitan Sydney over the next few decades.

Synod in 2012 approved a measure for all parishes to contribute \$2 million a year to a fund to buy land for church sites in greenfields areas in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

"What's Next?" takes shape

A DRAFT OF THE NEXT FORM OF THE DIOCESAN MISSION WILL BE PUT TO THE SYNOD IN OCTOBER.

The previous Diocesan Mission was adopted in 2002 to "multiply Bible-based Christian fellowships, congregations and churches", with the goal of seeing "10 per cent of the population of the region of the Diocese in Bible-based churches in 10 years". After the 2012 Synod, the "What's Next?" committee was set up and it found strong support among parishes for retaining a Diocesan Mission, in a new form.

Now, Synod members have been sent a draft that Archbishop Davies says is "a vision statement (what we hope to see) as well as a mission statement (what we want to do)".

There are four priorities with measurable goals. The goals start with the National Church Life Survey figures of 2011 and will be benchmarked against later NCLS figures.

One of the key goals is to increase the number of newcomers in congregations. Newcomers are defined as those adults who were not regularly attending any church in the previous five years. The NCLS in 2011 put the percentage of newcomers at 9 per cent, and the new goal is 12 per cent by 2020.

Other goals include helping people use their gifts, deepening spiritual maturity, increasing the number of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and the numbers of children staying in churches after they grow up.

"No document will cover everything that everyone believes should be incorporated," Dr Davies said. "Some parishes and organisations will develop their own local priorities. However, I am hoping that the Synod will come to a common mind on the kind of vision, mission, priorities and goals that this document proposes for the Diocese as a whole."

MISSION 2015 - 2020

DIOCESE OF SYDNEY

OUR VISION

To see Christ honoured in every community

OUR MISSION

In the power of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves afresh to glorify God and love our neighbour by proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ and living lives worthy of him.

PRIORITY 1 Increase the number of newcomers in church

Goal: increase newcomers in church from 9 per cent to 12 per cent.

PRIORITY 2 Deepen spiritual maturity among our members

Goal: increase our members reporting "much growth" in faith from 47 per cent to 60 per cent.

PRIORITY 3 Equip our members to exercise their gifts

Goal: increase our members reporting their use of gifts "to a great extent" from 21 per cent to 27 per cent.

PRIORITY 4 Respond to the changing face of our society

Goals: increase our members born in non-English-speaking countries from 15 per cent to 20 per cent and increase the retention of our members' children in church from 65 per cent to 70 per cent.

Goals sourced from the National Church Life Survey, 2011

Bishopscourt sale delayed



THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ANGLICAN PROPERTY TRUST, DR ROBERT TONG, SAYS AN INITIAL OFFERING of the neo-gothic mansion Bishopscourt (above) in Darling Point has been encouraging but no buyer has yet emerged.

Bishopscourt, formerly Greenoaks, was built in the mid-1840s by prominent colonial businessman Thomas Sutcliffe Mort. It has been the official residence of the Archbishop of Sydney since 1911.

A sale was first mooted in 1982 but it was not approved by the Synod of the Diocese until 2012.

"Synod authorised a five-year window for the sale because we always knew this might be a lengthy process," Dr Tong says.

Archbishop Glenn Davies, who was elected in 2013, did not move into the property upon appointment because of the impending sale process and the need for major renovations. These renovations are now underway, and the Archbishop will take up residence before the end of the year.

The sale "window" authorised two years ago by Synod lasts until October 2017 but could be extended.

"We believe the significance and stature of the building, together with its unparalleled location, will eventually attract the right buyer," Dr Tong says.

"Bishopscourt is listed on the Register of the National Estate and is one of the most significant properties in Sydney."

Prepare for purity now



Dr Weerakoon wants kids to learn about growing up – by the book.

NICK GILBERT

CHILDREN AT INCREASINGLY YOUNGER AGES ARE LEARNING ABOUT AND BEING CONFRONTED by issues around sexuality, identity and growing up, says a leading Christian sexologist and speaker.

Dr Patricia Weerakoon, an honorary senior lecturer at the University of Sydney and consultant sex educator and therapist, has been asked by parents and others to discuss issues of sexuality with primary-aged students, and has been surprised by the awareness among younger children about issues of sexuality.

"I would do these talks at schools, and I'd have Year 6 and 7 children asking about how gay men have sex, whether it's wrong to have oral sex, or when to know if they're 'ready' for sex," she says.

"They can't even spell it, and they want to know if they're ready! These questions really alerted me to how much knowledge these children are acquiring so early, and the need to get parents in particular to talk about these issues earlier."

Her latest book, *Growing Up By the Book*, is a sequel of sorts to her previous work, *Teen Sex By the Book*, but is targeted at this younger age group. Dr Weerakoon says she is particularly conscious of the need for parents to interact with their children, who are becoming sexually aware at increasingly younger ages.

"In a way, this book is really more for parents than children," she says. "All through the book, there are special sections where the child can go and talk with their parents and ask specific questions, in order to get that conversation started, and to bridge that gap. We want parents to feel they can talk to their children about these topics, and empower them in that."

Dr Weerakoon says availability of online information, and particularly the ubiquity and easy access of pornography to the average school child, means parents need to take a more forward-thinking approach to talking about sex with their kids.

"The reality is that we, and by 'we' I mean parents, need to be proactive," she says. "Either parents give kids the information, or they will get it from their friends who themselves don't know any better, they'll get it from porn, or they'll get it from school – which basically gives what they call a 'value-free' education that emphasises pleasure and safety, and isn't concerned with concepts like purity or any kind of promise, or integrity in sexuality. These are things parents need to teach."

Books awarded

A BOOK ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND AND KNOW THE VALUE OF GOD BETTER – GREG Clarke's *The Great Bible Swindle... And What Can be Done About It* – has taken top honours at the Australian Christian Book of the Year awards, presented in Melbourne last month.

Dr Clarke, who is CEO of the Bible Society Australia and involved at both Wild Street and York Street parishes, spoke in his acceptance speech of how the ideas of the book were sown 20 years ago in articles written for Matthias Media, which considered the idea "that everyone in Western culture needs to know the Bible in order to call themselves educated".

"There's an enormous scam, or swindle, going on in our culture where people are being denied basic knowledge of the Scriptures and the important role the Bible has played in bringing – to Western society in particular – many of the things that we know and cherish," Dr Clarke said. "I would love to see a new generation finding a way to restore the Bible to its rightful place in the educational experience, to understand its value for so many areas of cultural understanding... and also to see the amazing spiritual value of coming to an understanding of who Jesus of Nazareth really was."

Another Bible Society publication, *In God They Trust?* by Roy Williams, took out second place for its evaluation of the faith (or not) of Australia's Prime Ministers, while third place was given to radio presenter and Sydney Anglican Kel Richards for his novel *C.S. Lewis and the Body in the Basement*. A Youthworks publication, *Tactics for Teen Ministry* by Scott Petty, was one of five other books shortlisted for the top award.

In other awards, Moore College second-year student Joshua Maule won second prize in the Young Australian Christian Writer category for *Iesomo*, his biography of the Bishop of North Kivu Diocese in DR Congo, Bishop Muhindo Ise-somo.

Mauritian mission



Team member Caleb Leeming enjoys a joke at the children's program at Bain des Dames. PHOTO: Tim Deutscher

NICK GILBERT

A TEAM FROM ALBION PARK AND BOWRAL CHURCHES RECENTLY RETURNED FROM MAURITIUS after serving with the local church, particularly among disadvantaged, homeless children.

The senior minister at Albion Park, the Rev Steve Roberts, says the trip grew from connections forged by the Diocese and his own church.

"Eric and Jacqueline Ma Fat, who minister at St Paul's Anglican Church in Port Louis, came out to study at Moore College and they visited us," Mr Roberts says. "On our last Sunday, Eric thanked us and asked whether we would contemplate sending a team over to help sometime. That... put the wheels in motion on a mission trip."

The team was based in Port Louis but spent a significant amount of time in a village for disadvantaged children operated by global NGO, SOS Children's Villages. Many of the children are abandoned by their poor families and cared for by SOS and trained volunteer "mothers".

"The church in Port Louis hadn't previously connected with these villages, but had said they'd like to support it," Mr Roberts says. "Just the smiles on the kids' faces as we spent time with them really struck me. We ran some kids' clubs, I was able to share the gospel with 12 kids there who responded and decided to follow Christ, and St Paul's in Port Louis also decided to include supporting the village in their regular ministry work.

"We also had an opportunity to meet the Australian Ambassador to Mauritius who got really excited about these links... she's going to look at the possibility of some funding as well."

Back in Port Louis, the team took part in an Anglican church's ministry to kids in disadvantaged areas, using animal puppets and a team-made puppet theatre. "They have what we'd understand as a standard kids' club, but they've gone to... the poorest parts of the city. The kids just loved it," Mr Roberts says.

"You read in the Bible about... people who've been cut out from society and religion, and just the gratitude and emotion that comes from them when they meet Jesus... we've really seen the love and restoration that the gospel offers."

Canberra-Goulburn laments past abuse



Diocesan sorrow: Bishop Robinson delivers the apology via video.

A LETTER FROM THE BISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN, THE RT REV STUART ROBINSON, was read out in all diocesan churches on August 10. It apologised for “any abuse or mistreatment” experienced by individuals or groups connected with the Church.

The special “Lamentation Sunday” services were organised by the diocese out of a desire to convey “our deep and genuine sadness in relation to the pain and brokenness that people have experienced as a result of their engagement with our Church”.

Bishop Robinson’s letter, also available in video on the diocesan website, called for people to come forward to begin reconciliation. “We know that the hurt and sorrow can last for decades – indeed generations – and so we’d value the opportunity to work with people towards wholeness, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration – and trust that this service might begin to address such things,” he said.

The Anglican Church in Australia officially apologised for child abuse in institutions and churches in 2004.

In Sydney, the annual Tears and Hope service for survivors of child abuse will be held at St John’s, Darlinghurst on November 3.

Kerrie Newmarch, the chaplain of Sydney’s Professional Standards Unit, said, “It is appropriate as God’s people to acknowledge that abuse of any type is wrong and that the consequences for survivors is lifelong. It is important to sit with each other in the pain and grief that abuse brings.

“I invite both those who know this loss from personal experience and those who are secondary victims to come and join us in this unique service where both tears and hope will be found.”

Support for Iraqi Christians



An Iraqi woman and her family flee the city of Mosul. photo: UNHCR

THE ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY'S ANGLICAN AID EMERGENCY APPEAL TO HELP IRAQI CHRISTIANS fleeing persecution has already sent \$50,000 to the office of the Primate of the Middle East, Bishop Mouner Anis, for distribution as emergency relief. By late August, more than \$100,000 had been raised.

As well as donating to the appeal, prayer meetings have been organised in churches across Diocese – and around the world – with many also displaying the Arabic letter “N” for “Nazarene” (or follower of Jesus) symbol in solidarity with the Christian persecuted, whose homes in Iraq have been marked with the symbol.

One such prayer meeting, at St Michael's Cathedral, Wollongong, heard from an Iraqi Christian woman originally from the ancient Christian town of Mosul (near the ruins of Nineveh), who now studies in Wollongong.

“It was moving to hear our Iraqi sister in Christ share about the impact of persecution and displacement on her immediate family,” said Canon Sandy Grant, senior minister at St Michael's.



Canon Sandy Grant with Bishop Hayward (front row right) and others hold up the Nazarene symbol at the Iraq prayer service at St Michael's Cathedral, Wollongong.

“Her brother had lost his home and his job as a doctor. Her sister and family had been displaced from their village. She especially asked us to pray for the children of that land to be preserved from further harm, and also to uphold those whom these traumatic events cause to doubt their faith in God.”

The forces of the “Islamic State”, seeking to create a caliphate, swept through Christian towns – and towns peopled by other religious minorities – threatening death for those who did not convert or pay a protection tax.

Canon Andrew White, the Anglican vicar of St George's, Baghdad, has kept the world updated through social media about the increasing persecution of Christians – which he referred to in one stark Facebook post as “the reality of life, death and suffering here”. The post showed an entire, murdered, Christian family.

A recent update from Canon White, sent shortly before *Southern Cross* went to press, spoke on one hand of the joy of children at St George's receiving bibles and preparing for their first communion, while on the other told of a disabled local who “was not able to flee with everybody else so he hid with his children. Eventually the Islamic State broke into the house. They lined up the children and said that unless he converted to Islam they would all have their heads chopped off. He said the words of conversion and they allowed him and his children to live, but made them stay.

“He cried on the phone to me, ‘Abouna, Abouna, I still love Yesua. Will he still love me and my children?’ I assured him that he did, and that he still was a Christian and belonged to Yesua. I thought what would I have done if my boys were going to be killed in front of me?”

In Sydney, Archbishop Glenn Davies described the killings as “horrifying” and called for fervent prayer and urgent action.

Driscoll steps down



Taking a break: Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll PHOTO: Will Foster

MEGACHURCH PASTOR MARK DRISCOLL HAS TEMPORARILY STEPPED DOWN FROM MARS HILLS Church after being removed from the church planting network he co-founded.

The board of the ACTS 29 network issued a statement with “deep sorrow”, saying their decision had been taken because of accusations against Mr Driscoll. The board referred to “accusations against Mark, most of which have been confirmed by him”, which “make it untenable and unhelpful to keep Mark and Mars Hill in our network”.

Mr Driscoll has been involved in a number of controversies in recent years including accusations of crude language, plagiarism and a marketing scheme to boost his book *Real Marriage* onto the bestseller list. After the announcement the Southern Baptist bookstore chain LifeWay Christian Resources removed all his books from its website and stores across the US.

Later, 21 former employees of the Seattle church filed charges against Mr Driscoll with his executive board, saying he had engaged in a pattern of abusive, intimidating conduct and had not changed. As Mr Driscoll is a member of that board, he said in late August he would step down and cancel speaking engagements.

“I have requested a break for processing, healing, and growth for a minimum of six weeks while the leadership assigned by our bylaws conduct a thorough examination of accusations against me,” he said in a statement. “I believe their review can best be performed without me being in the pulpit or the office. “I have begun meeting with a professional team of mature Christians who provide wise counsel to help further my personal development and maturity before God and men.”

While declaring some of the allegations unfounded, Mr Driscoll added, “I’m sorry for the times I have been angry, short, or insensitive. I’m sorry for anything I’ve done to distract from our mission by inviting criticism, controversy or negative media attention”.

His statement came after a *New York Times* article that quoted Dr Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian in New York. “In the internet age, Mark Driscoll definitely built up the evangelical movement enormously,” Dr Keller said. “But the brashness and the arrogance and the rudeness in personal relationships – which he himself has confessed repeatedly – was obvious to many from the earliest days... he has definitely now disillusioned quite a lot of people.”

» The dangers of digital church, page 13

The spirit of the law

KEITH MASON

PROFESSOR GRANT GILMORE IS ONE OF MY FAVOURITE LEGAL SCHOLARS. HE ONCE WROTE THAT: *“in heaven there will be no law, and the lion will lie down with the lamb... In hell there will be nothing but law, and due process will be meticulously observed”*.

We who live in Australia in 2014 get constant glimpses of hell and heaven, whether or not we are Sydney Anglicans in the pews. We witness the capacity of human beings to neglect or harm each other, and themselves. And we see love in action as men and women – all stamped in the image of God – minister to each other in selfless ways.

Grant Gilmore was, of course, focusing on the law rather than matters theological. He was telling us that law can oppress as well as protect; and that it often adopts strict letters and harsh sentences when it is moved to action.

However, what I speak about now involves a more fruitful encounter between law and grace. I say this because the St John's Legal Centre meets the men and women of Kings Cross, literally in the street where they live, and certainly at their true points of need.

For the church, this is a gospel-motivated mission. The processes of the law are being used to uplift and liberate rather than to limit and control.

I believe it was in 1994 that St John's commenced its legal counselling and referral centre, providing a free advisory and occasional advocacy service for marginalised people. It was then under the direction of Prue Gregory, a friend of mine of very long standing. What we celebrate now is a venture that has been running successfully for years.

In a recent speech I heard by Chief Justice French he pointed out that a lawyer may contemplate accepting a client *pro bono* [free] for a variety of reasons – some of them selfish, others entirely altruistic. Whatever the motives of the lawyer or the clients, the whole community is the richer for it.

The St John's Legal Centre offers free legal advice to the street community. Using a principal solicitor to co-ordinate the volunteer services of a large group of legal professionals, the centre provides valuable assistance in the areas of housing, family law and relationships, debt, fines, discrimination, victim's compensation, powers of attorney and guardianship and with criminal law issues. The centre ministers effectively to the local community in areas of real need. In that way, the centre also responds to the calling of the Christian folk at St John's, Darlinghurst to be a light and salt to the world around them.

In the fallen world between heaven and hell, which we all inhabit this side of the grave, there are massive injustices. Some stem from the very fountains of justice, namely the State, the courts and the police. Government may be divinely instituted but it must function through fallible humans working with limited resources and dependent on the co-operation of others to deliver democratic policies as well as justice in the particular.

Many of this centre's clients are the victims of law, whether or not they are also on the wrong side of it from time to time. Of course, everyone has done things contrary to law at times. And many of us have got caught up in destructive business, professional or family disputes. But most of us have been fortunate in that our breaches were minor, or undetected, and we have had monetary and family support enabling us to cope with whatever crises have come our way.

The same cannot be said of many of the clients of St John's Legal Centre. Effective access to law and equality before the law may have been no more than echoed slogans. A man once famously said that the courts were open to rich and poor alike, before adding “like the Ritz Hotel”.

A large percentage of the men and women who use the centre are victims of institutional or corporate injustice. Their personal circumstances – mental illness, addictions, intellectual disability – may have contributed to their uncomfortable brushes with law and government. Those circumstances will certainly have impaired their capacity to respond to difficulties. Knowing where to go for information, let alone redress, may be quite beyond them. Filling out essential forms in this bureaucratic age may be the last straw.

The need is all about us, and I wish to congratulate all who are working so generously and competently here at St John's to alleviate it from a pastoral, legal and counselling viewpoint.

On behalf of the worldwide Anglican Communion (of which I am a member) represented here by the parish of St John's, Darlinghurst, I want to thank K & L Gates and its Sydney lawyers for the significant ongoing contribution being made to the work of the centre. On behalf of the worldwide legal profession (of which I am also a member), I want to thank the parish and the clients for the opportunity to work among you in doing things that are truly meaningful.

On behalf of the clients who are the embodiment of worldwide fallen humanity (of which I am most certainly a member) I want to thank everyone whose effort, money and encouragement enables this venture of service to continue.

Former Justice Keith Mason is president of the Appellate Tribunal and Chancellor of Armidale Diocese. This is an edited version of a speech he gave at a celebration of the St John's Legal Centre earlier this year.

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

MOVES



NIXON TO ARV

The Rev Andrew Nixon has been appointed the new director of mission for Anglican Retirement Villages (ARV). He replaces Bishop Chris Edwards who is now the Bishop of North Sydney. Mr Nixon is best known as the executive director of the Diocese's Connect09 campaign. He has since been the director of Youthworks' Year 13 program and more recently principal of Youthworks College.

"It has been a difficult decision to leave Youthworks College as there are exciting times ahead, but the time is right to recruit a leader for the next decade," Mr Nixon says. "Year 13 is in good hands and will continue making a significant contribution in the life of our churches."

As for his new challenge at the other end of the age spectrum, he says that "for youth or the elderly, the message of Christ is the same... The Australian population is ageing – we know that – and as people move into their later years it is a critical opportunity to consider the big questions of life. Not just those making the transitions, but their families and carers as well."

"ARV is an important mission field, touching thousands of people... who may otherwise have no contact with the message of Christ. The leadership of ARV is very much committed to the mission of Jesus, and the gospel possibilities are very significant. I am looking forward to supporting chaplains, pastoral care workers and general staff as they care for people every day and to working with the ARV leadership as we navigate an exciting period ahead."

ARV chief executive Rob Freeman says Mr Nixon has "a wealth of experience in management in a variety of contexts and under God has an enviable record of achievement within the Diocese".

"When combined with his obvious passion for seeing the name of Jesus known, this makes him a great fit for ARV as we seek to ensure the love of Christ is not only expressed through the work of our chaplains and pastoral carers, but... evident in all aspects of our care and services."

NEXT STAGE FOR BRADFORD

The rector of Hunters Hill, the Rev Philip Bradford, retires next month "to part-time ministry rather than to sit and smell the roses".

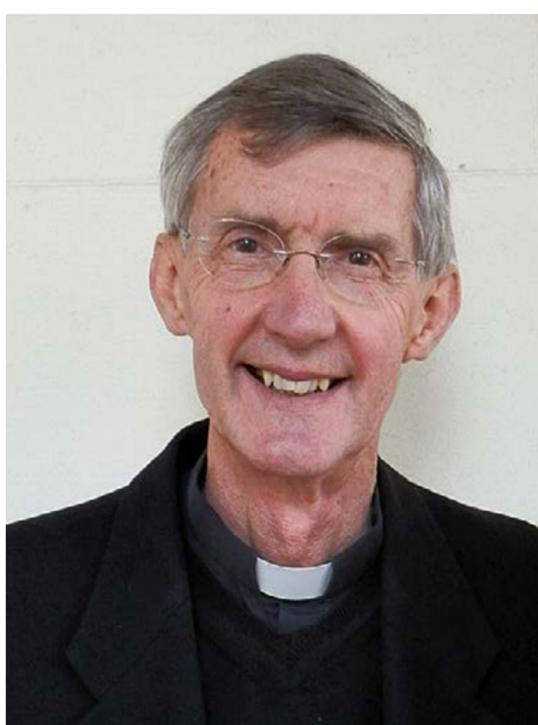
Mr Bradford has ministered in a range of Sydney parishes since his ordination in 1987, beginning at Darling Point, then Darlinghurst and Paddington, before becoming rector of Hunters Hill in 2000.

He says he and his wife Rosemary "felt this was the right time, and we're hopeful that the right person will follow us in God's good provision".

"We've had a good time at Hunters Hill – it's been a very busy parish. It's one of those old traditional parishes with two beautiful buildings... so there's been an easy entrée to a whole group of people who are wanting to come to us, a good ministry to married couples and families, lots of activities and two play groups. Life's been very full.

"We've just loved parish ministry. We've found it demanding and challenging but it's a privilege to be with people at very significant moments in their lives, through marriage and bereavement and all the ups and downs of life, and it's wonderfully rewarding as well."

The Bradfords will resettle in the inner west, from where Mr Bradford will continue part-time ministry such as locums and involvement with the Mission to Seafarers and the healing ministry at St Andrew's Cathedral.



NEW HEAD FOR YEAR 13

Youthworks has appointed the Rev Luther Symons as director of its Year 13 program.

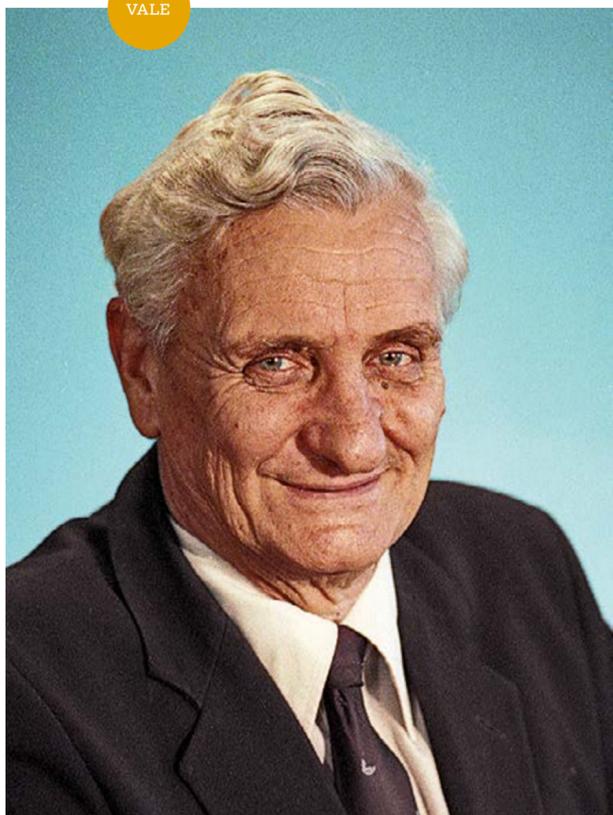
The gap year program has seen a boom in numbers since 2011, and recently took 78 students on its annual mission trip to Fiji.

Mr Symons was most recently a lecturer and tutor at Year 13, but was also involved in the leadership of the diocesan Jesus Brings campaign, as well as having six years in parish ministry.

"Having been part of the Year 13 team this year, I've seen first hand what a profound impact Year 13 has on school leavers," he says. "Seeing so many young people wanting to learn from the Bible and wrestle through the big questions in life – it's a joy to be a part of. I'm particularly looking forward to seeing how we can better serve local churches through Year 13."

Youthworks CEO Zac Veron said of the appointment that "Year 13 is one of the most effective ministries our Diocese has for the discipleship of young people. I'm thrilled to have someone of Luther's calibre leading this important work and seeking ways to orient even more young people towards Jesus for life."

VALE



Owen Shelley, who spent more than 30 years as children's missionary with Scripture Union, died of heart failure on August 2.

Mr Shelley, who was 87, was well known to generations of Christians in Sydney and NSW for his talks and storytelling at church services, outreach events and beach missions.

Describing his father as "a pioneer in using the technology of the day (overhead projectors) to share the good news of Jesus to thousands of children throughout NSW",

Mr Shelley's son Stephen said he had been working with his father to create ministry resources suitable for use in the new digital age.

"He was still working on our latest project, updating the *A to Z of Ministry with Children*, the night before he died," Stephen Shelley said. "I shall finish his project now that he is gone. I started [the website] Shelley and Son so that his skills, knowledge and insight in children's ministry would not be lost. I am so glad that we were able to produce so much while we still had time.

"He was commenting the night before he died how fortunate he had been that he has never

lost any of his children," Stephen said. "We have now lost him but are comforted by the knowledge that he is now with his Lord."

The chairman of SU in NSW, the Rev Simon Flinders, described Mr Shelley as a "Scripture Union legend".

"No-one in our movement's history has done more to dignify ministry to children than Owen," he said. "His zeal for the gospel, and his creativity in telling it, have together been an inspiration and a model for many. He was energetic and enthusiastic to the last and we will miss him keenly. But we give great thanks to God for the life and service of our brother."

No healing monopoly

Canon Christopher Allan ("The truth about healing", SC, August) introduces a jarring note into his review of Scott Blackwell's book *Healed at last* by saying that evangelicals are the only safe hands to hold healing ministries. Canon Allan says that there are others who, in the end, simply have nothing to say to those who are not healed, and regard the unhealed as failures.

Most of us have heard of healing abuses with healing crusades centred on sensationalism and money making, but Canon Allan fails to define his target. In the early church the gift of healing was regarded as one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9) and there were prayers for the sick with anointing with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

Not everyone is healed, and not every prayer is answered in the way that we want, but I'm not aware of anyone who thinks that the unhealed are "simply failures". For Canon Allan to say that the healing ministry is only safe in evangelical hands is an insult to Christians in all the mainstream churches who have for centuries been at the forefront of medical and spiritual healing. They also have a message for everyone who is suffering.

James Moore
Kingsgrove



In reading Canon Christopher Allan's review of Scott Blackwell's *Healed at Last* (SC, August) I appreciated mention of how the book "puts God and not us at the centre" and reminds us "that God is sovereign in every circumstance and his love is personal for each of us".

Canon Allan believes the inevitable conclusion one draws from the book is that "it is evangelicals who should run healing ministries", going on to claim that "evangelicals are the only safe hands to hold healing ministries" and that others "have nothing to say to those who are not healed".

I would like to pay tribute to the great blessing received by many through evangelical healing ministry (including the long-standing ministry at St Andrew's Cathedral). In my experience, however, biblically based healing ministry has (and still does) bring equally great blessing in Anglican churches that would not be considered "evangelical" in the Sydney diocesan sense: for example, Sydney's Christ Church St Laurence.

While on home assignment in Australia as a CMS missionary many years ago, circumstances led to my attending healing services at that church, where I found "a message for everyone who [was] suffering... a message of God's love, power and wisdom that [showed] itself in salvation, in assurance, and in care and compassion". I feel the need to testify that this ministry "[put] God and not [me] at the centre", and not at all that the unhealed were regarded as "simply failures".

Frances Boland
Castle Hill

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

Thank you for your fantastic article about university ministry and especially Campus Bible Ministries at UWS Bankstown ("A beautiful friendship", SC, August). Several students were excited and greatly encouraged to see their club in print in your magazine.

In addition to the wonderful support and commitment of Padstow Anglican and Richard Blight, I would also like to acknowledge my thankfulness to God for the invaluable support of other churches in the local area who regularly pray for the students and give generously to provide my wage. These churches include Panania Anglican (my home church), Riverside Anglican Churches, Revesby Presbyterian (whose pastor, the Rev Dr Peter Barnes, is also a UWS chaplain and involved with CBM), Revesby Congregational, Panania Uniting and East Hills Baptist.

Tim Willson
AFES staff worker,
UWS Bankstown

Housing challenge

In response to Paul Perini's essay about public housing (SC, July), one of the ways Anglicare and/or the Sydney Diocese could help is to use funds to create low-cost housing, perhaps on the basis of one- to two-year occupation.

As the average age rises, demand for low-cost rental accommodation is going to rise also. Most new construction is created for investment, the best profit being made with houses at or above the average. Low-cost housing does not provide the same return and is therefore neglected.

In my area, for those on benefits, rent makes up 50 per cent or more of income and is likely to rise in the near future. There is considerable rental stress here.

We cannot hope to meet the whole need, but we could provide such housing for those in particular need such as single parents on welfare or the unemployed. It could help to reduce the pressures that make life as a family very difficult, by creating some stability and improving the mental health of the tenants. We could, moreover, provide community chaplains to those living in such accommodation, who could also liaise with local churches to add Christian contact as well as material support.

David Ashton
Katoomba

MUSICAL JOY

Vernon Wilkins' letter in the August edition of SC continues the subject of the relationship of church music to elephants in the room. As one who has been tickling the ivories in churches for more than 50 years I may perhaps be allowed a brief comment. The suggestion that many churchgoers would be happy if singing in church were abolished may well be true, but it is certain that there are also large numbers of Christians who would be very sad if such a thing happened.

Church organs suffered very much in the second half of the last century because of the little cheap "spinet" instruments with partly amputated keyboards, including a pedal board, which looked more like a garden rake than a keyboard. The problem was worsened by pianists who willingly (or otherwise) played these instruments instead of a piano.

One bright beam of light is the hymn-playing competition of young organists started last year by the Organ Music Society of Sydney. The musical director and chief organist at St Andrew's Cathedral, Ross Cobb, does his best to encourage the Diocese in hymn singing with organ accompaniment, and when he and other good organists accompany traditional hymns and some of the better modern songs the effect is superb.

The idea that singing in church should be abandoned seems like a retreat to despair which would serve only to reduce the joy of the many Christians who love to sing about what they believe.

David Morrison
Springwood



Image bearers

DR GLENN DAVIES

AS I WRITE THIS COLUMN THE WORLD IS WITNESSING WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE wholesale destruction of everything Christian in the northern parts of Iraq, following the fall of Mosul in June and the fall of Qaraqosh in August at the hands of virulent and iniquitous jihadist insurgents who profess to fight under the banner of Islam. This group of militant Sunni Muslims has gone under various names, most recently adopting IS (Islamic State) as its moniker, spanning the crescent from Jordan to Iraq, but with aspirations to unite all Muslims under one Caliphate.

Mosul and Qaraqosh are not far from the ancient site of Nineveh, where the prophet Jonah once brought news of God's impending judgment. The Ninevites' response was to repent and seek the mercy of the Lord, which readily came (even though Jonah was a reluctant messenger of God's grace). Yet where God was merciful, the Islamic State is anything but merciful. The recent report of Canon Andrew White, Anglican minister in Baghdad, recounting the beheading of a five-year-old boy in Qaraqosh, is horrific in the extreme, as was the decapitation of the journalist James Foley broadcast through social media.

We are now facing a humanitarian catastrophe, as more than a million displaced Iraqis flee for their lives. This is in addition to the millions of people seeking asylum as they flee from persecution in other parts of the world.

Over the past decade the question of asylum seekers has arrested the minds of many Australians. It has been a thorny issue for the present Government, as it has been for the governments of Rudd, Gillard and Howard. Unfortunately the public dialogue on asylum seekers in Australia has rarely focused on the positive aspects of settling refugees, let alone our obligations as image bearers of God to provide for the vulnerable, the dispossessed and the needy among us – who likewise bear the image of God. Too often the hysteria of fear has driven the public conversation such that we ignore our obligations as Christians, let alone our obligations as a country to abide by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Australia is not only a signatory to that document, but was one of the eight nations involved in its drafting.

The Old Testament regularly defines a triad of vulnerable people for whom Israel was to take special care: widows, orphans and aliens. In today's society we recognise the importance of providing for widows and orphans through social security and other means but the alien, the refugee and the stranger do not attract the same degree of sympathy in the Australian consciousness. And there is no doubt that we, as Christians, should be at the forefront of hospitality to strangers (Hebrews 13:2).

While we may criticise the Federal Government for some aspects of its asylum seeker policy, particularly the incarceration of children in detention centres, we should also applaud the Government for its recent decision to accept 4400 refugees from Syria and Iraq.

I recently met a Pakistani man on a temporary protection visa, which was due to expire. While in Australia, he had come into contact with an Anglican church, obtained a copy of the Bible in Urdu and by God's grace had become a Christian. Praise God! We have a gospel for all nations and all tribes, and we have a gospel that encourages us to welcome the stranger so that we might display the love of Christ to those in need. We have a clear responsibility to give ourselves to urgent prayer for those in immediate danger and in the longer term be prepared to welcome to our shores those who have fled such horrific scenes.

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.



The truth about healing

We talk about it, we pray for it and the Bible is filled with miraculous examples of it. But do we really understand what healing is (and isn't) about, asks **Scott Blackwell**.

IT WAS 3.35AM ON A THURSDAY MORNING. IT HAD BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE MY RETURN from hospital after a total right hip prosthesis (hip replacement) and I couldn't sleep. In the end, I stared at the night-black ceiling and tried to pray, pondering how exactly, at the age of 48, I found myself in this position – and why only a reasonably long period of discomfort, hard work and perseverance was going to bring me out of it.

Why had God allowed this to happen? Why had he never fixed my physical problems – even though I, along with many others, had often asked (and even begged) him to? Why would he not assist me now and make it all better – by a touch, by a word, by an answer to my prayer?

I am acutely aware that such questions are not just my own. I know that the topic is a deeply emotional one for many people. And my response is borne out of my desire to speak in a straightforward and accessible way about how I understand that God has spoken about healing from his word, the Bible.

I want to declare one truth very clearly. There is no doubt that the God of the Bible is the God who has the power to heal, both physically and spiritually. This element of God's grace, sovereignty, power and authority is not in dispute. He can heal. He does heal. He will continue to heal. And it is entirely right and proper that God's people continue to pray for such an experience of his grace, sovereignty, power and authority in their lives.

Because the issues surrounding the topic of personal healing are serious, and often involve significant personal struggle, the promises God makes in Scripture demand careful attention. In the area of healing, as in all applications of biblical teaching to the life of faith, it is crucial to separate the truth from myth, speculation, invention and falsehood.

PHYSICAL REALITY, SPIRITUAL HEALING

At the age of three I contracted pneumococcal meningitis. The doctors prepared my mother for one of two things: the profound disability of her son, or his death. I remember nothing of my illness or the physiotherapy I was required to undergo at home and in hospital for long months afterwards in order to learn to sit, crawl and walk again. To this day my mother insists that, because of the prayers of the Michelton Salvation Army, God spared me and set me apart. I was destined, she says, for something else.

I wore a monstrously heavy brace on my right leg until I was eight or nine years old, and remember the sheer joy of running without the brace so clearly it is almost a taste still in my mouth – the excitement of playing cricket, Aussie rules football and, later, rugby. I always played with a profound limp, I was always slow, but my family and school friends always encouraged me. They seemed not to see the disability at all. But in the end I was not normal. I knew I wasn't.

Though I was the recipient of such grace and favour from God, of such love from my family, of such acceptance from my friends, I yearned for that little bit more. I longed for the anonymity that being like everyone else brings. I prayed for it. I wanted so desperately to be healed and I couldn't understand why God wasn't able to hear my prayers or see my tears of frustration and need.

Yet I had already received so much, and my disability prevented me from nothing. I was, in every way imaginable, the tangible product of God's healing hand, his mercy and grace.

The night I finally realised the whole truth of the gospel, the love of God fell on me like a hammer blow and I held my ribs while I wept, fearing that my heart would either break or burst under the impact. They were tears of grief blended with joy that God would love me in such a way, that God would save me at the terrible cost of the death of his one and only Son. I sat in grieving silence for hours.

A love I had never dreamed existed, let alone experienced, provoked this crisis. And, when the crisis was over, I stood up as a new creation, a new man with a radically transformed understanding of what it means to be truly healed.

THE PURPOSE OF HEALING

In the ministry of Christ as presented to us through the gospels, miraculous healing (and indeed every miracle) has a purpose that goes far beyond its immediate circumstances. I believe every act of healing in the Bible is a signpost that directs us forward to the greater healing to come with the return of Christ.

The unclean made whole are a sign of the great cleansing from sin that Jesus makes effective through the shedding of his blood. Friends, sons and daughters are raised to life again as a sign of the new life to come, guaranteed by Christ's victory over death. The lame and feeble are made strong, fit for a kingdom in which every wrong is redressed and every hurt paid for by the servant who suffered on behalf of us all. The possessed are liberated as signs of the peace and reconciliation awaiting all who submit to the love of the Messiah.

Biblical healing lifts our eyes and raises our heads, for each wonderful event speaks of the great act of healing yet to come. They are like spotlights shining upon a megastar who stands centre stage. Their function is not to attract attention to themselves, but rather to focus attention on their subject.

Like everyone else, Christians have a tendency to be short-sighted and forgetful. Life becomes busy, pressures increase, health fails, accidents happen, loved ones suffer and money becomes tight. It becomes easy to forget the gifts we have been given in Christ – gifts that we desperately need. They are miraculous gifts for our healing, and far too precious to be left uncherished by blinkered people constantly in search of something a little more shiny and titillating.

Is it not strange that we have become so blasé concerning God's great gift of a rescuer who would save us from our own stupidity, folly and pain? I suspect we find this truth less than fascinating because these days we hardly recognise that we require rescuing. We are so continuously carried away with our own importance, independence and self-confidence that we are incapable of conceiving that our behaviour leads only and ever toward disaster.

Knowing the full extent of our incapacity to reach up, God reached down to us in Christ Jesus – *God with us, Immanuel*. The cross is a gift. God's rescuer will lay down his life in order to ensure those who follow him will never know death. Through him you have been reconciled to God and given a new life and new status: that of a dearly loved child. You have the opportunity to come home again and, like Jesus, be perfect in the Father's eyes.

I wonder if you even knew you needed all these things? Our world is one where people do not forgive but prefer to hold grudges. Where we look after ourselves above everyone else and, as a consequence, children go without food, medicine and clean water. And no matter what we do, it just seems to get worse every year. Of course we need a rescuer! How could we possibly forget this dire need and the magnificence of God's provision to answer it? "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed'" (1 Peter 2:24).

It is past time that we remembered and committed ourselves to that which is truly the most miraculous of God's gifts – the gift of sonship within the kingdom. It is past time that the cross of Christ was brought back to the centre of Christian faith, preaching and practice, to be understood and recognised as the true and only place where ultimate healing is found. For it is at the cross where the man who is Jesus becomes the Messiah who is Jesus. It is at the cross where the Almighty God becomes my heavenly Father. It is at the cross where rebellious sinner becomes beloved child.

"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

There is no greater healing than this.



PROMISE AND EXPECTATION

But what exactly are we discussing when we talk about healing within a Christian's faith? Is it miraculous healing, medical healing, emotional healing, deliverance healing or some other variation or manifestation of personal restoration? In fact, what we are truly talking about is God's sovereignty and the outworking of his promises and purposes, and our expectations of that sovereignty, promise and purpose.

Because the discussion of the topic of healing is serious business we must make sure our conversation is well informed by our knowledge of who God is and what his purposes are. We must not set aside our theology and we must always keep our bibles open. This may seem obvious but it isn't, because knowledge, theology and Scripture are not always the starting points in this discussion. More often than not, the actual starting point is personal experience. And while I have my own experiences to relate and reflect upon, they are still only my experiences, and it seems to me that any meaningful discussion of healing *must* always begin from a strong knowledge of the Scriptures and a robust theology rather personal *experience*.

I came quickly to the conclusion that I could not live my Christian life, or interpret the world around me, purely through the grid of my own experiences. God did not always meet my expectations, nor did others I loved, and I frequently felt disappointed or frustrated.

I was pleased to find that the Bible writers shared these same anxieties (especially King David in the psalms, Elijah after Mount Carmel, and Job in his sufferings), but I was struck by the fact that the source of their personal resilience and confidence appeared not to be their experience, but rather their knowledge of the person and character of the God who had revealed himself to them. Indeed, the more that their experience appeared to shout that God was against them, or did not care, or was not close, the more their knowledge of the truth about the Lord's character and promises held sway.

To put it another way, their theology (knowledge of God) was unshakably strong, and so they based their understanding of the world around them in the objective reality of God's revelation.

The outworking of this solid foundation of knowledge was that they lived lives of unwavering perseverance. They walked in faith.

THE TRUTH

The Scriptures are full of pleas to God from the saints for protection from trouble, misfortune and harm. Again and again the Bible shows us situations where the people of God are the objects of strife and trouble, usually as a result of their own sinful shortsightedness, but often as a result of circumstances beyond their control. In all of these situations, what becomes perfectly clear is that the saints of God are rarely shielded from the trials and tribulations of life as it really is.

The terrible truth of our existence this side of the garden is the fact that life is hard. Life is hard for you; life is hard for me. Life is hard for everyone.

This is a truth that is not only taught everywhere within the pages of Scripture, but it is also explained by Scripture. Our world is frustrated, people are flawed, relationships are a mess. This has been the case since the first man and woman were expelled from the garden and it has never ceased being the case from that time forward. No matter how fervently we might wish that it was not so, this is the world as it truly is and the Bible makes no bones about where responsibility for this brokenness lies – it lies with humanity. This is the world as we have made it.

At this point our doctrine of the sovereignty of the God of the Bible becomes vitally important. If we believe in a sovereign God, we must believe that he is in control of both the good and the bad that occurs in life. It is an absurdity to credit him with sovereignty over one but not the other.

To this end then, every instance of trial or difficulty within the pages of the Bible is actually presented as an opportunity. It is the opportunity to exercise confidence and faith in God in the face of crippling circumstances or dire need. This is the task of looking life straight in the eye and understanding that no matter what your situation or circumstance, God will do exactly as he has promised. For the Christian, it is the promise that he will see you secure in your salvation and in your status as a much loved child.

In fact, it is exactly this truth that the writer to the Hebrews is concerned to communicate in his marvellous passage concerning the great cloud of witnesses (Heb 11:1-12:12). Having undergone all manner of testing, hardship, trial, persecution and even death, their role is to stand as witnesses to us that God's character, word and promise are true. Despite their difficult lives, their reward was never compromised for a moment.

HEALING AND GRACE

That the Lord has the power to heal is made clear at Genesis 20. That this Lord is indeed the great healer is made even more explicit in Exodus 15 where, having rescued Israel from Egypt, destroyed their enemies, guided the nation safely through the Red Sea and provided for their sustenance in purifying the waters at Marah, the Lord declares: "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you" (Exodus 15:26).

The revelation of Yahweh as the great healer of his chosen people is shown in the unfolding drama of Israel's experiences. In longsuffering patience and great mercy this sovereign Lord will dress the (often self-inflicted) wounds of his people and restore their vigour. The point we must not lose as we read these revelations is that the emphasis throughout the Bible is never on who is healed but rather on who does the healing and the purposes behind his action.

When Jesus appears in the gospels, he is presented almost immediately as an extraordinary healer, preacher, teacher and exorcist. However it is important to note that each of the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) present Jesus' remarkable healing ministry as primarily affording the opportunity to teach the crowds.

My contention is that there is always a specific intent and purpose behind the healing miracles within the Bible. They rarely, if ever, occur purely for the benefit of the individual or nation alone. There is a larger plan afoot.

They are a sign. They are a window through which we are given an opportunity to discern God's greater intention. As such, the healing miracles in the Scriptures are never man-centred. There is a theological and revelatory meaning within each that is entirely God-centred. In short, we must keep in mind the "big picture" if we are to understand the meaning of the fine detail – but this does not mean that we may disregard God's genuine personal concern for the individual and nation.

One of the most difficult and wonderful things I have had to do as a Christian pastor is to watch my friend Steve come to church. Steve has forever been wheelchair-bound, and his arm or head movement are often uncontrolled or controlled with difficulty – especially when he gets excited. His speech is difficult to understand, and his vocabulary is limited. Because he was born in the 1950s, those who cared for him made certain assumptions about his ability to learn, respond and understand. He was institutionalised and given minimal stimulation and therapy. It was assumed he would never be able to read, so he was never taught.

Now in his fifties, Steve is thoroughly dependent on the aid of others. He requires assistance to eat, drink, bathe, dress, toilet, and so on. All of this is so much more difficult to witness knowing that trapped within Steve's dysfunctional body is a sharp and inquiring mind that was left untended and ignored for years.

No-one pretends that it's not a struggle for him – yet Steve is the most joy-filled and enthusiastic believer in Jesus I think I've ever met. Hope and trust in God's promises through Christ burn brighter in Steve than in anyone else I know. In our church it's impossible to preach about the return of Jesus, or the great resurrection day, or even death, without being interrupted by the man in the front who is madly flailing his arms around and shouting with excitement, "No more chair!"

Each difficult day is an opportunity to express faith, hope, patience, and obedience and to give honour and glory to Christ Jesus. Steve is a most amazing example of God's healing and grace.

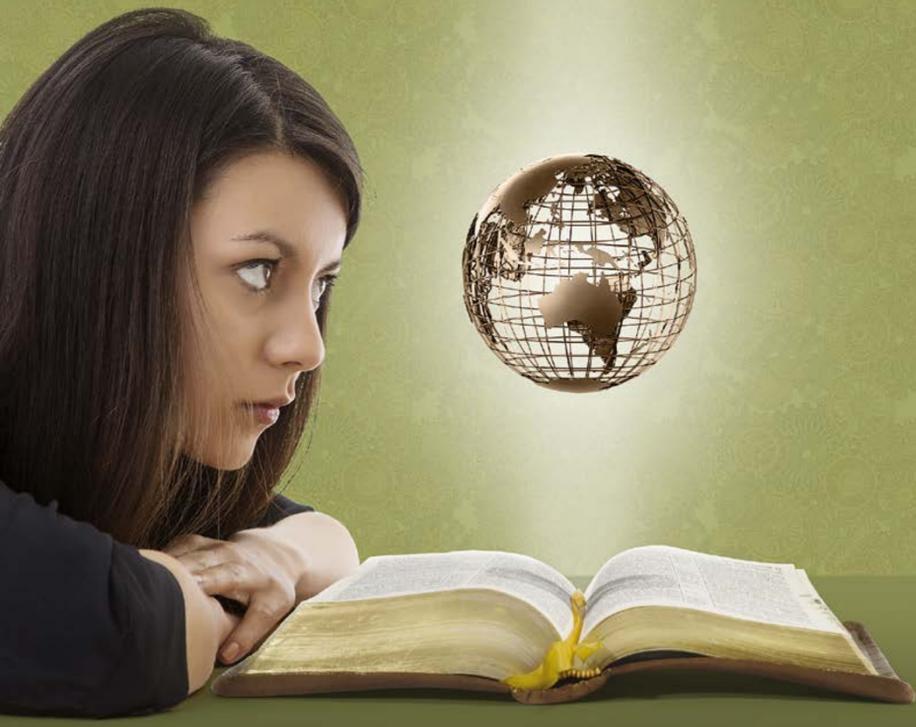
When my father died suddenly at the age of 69 I was numb. I could ball up my fists and ask "Why?" but I knew why. There is no promise from God that those we love will not be taken from us; there is no guarantee the ones I cherish will live long and carefree lives. I hope that this will be so, I pray for God's mercy and grace – but I have no promise, no guarantee.

Life bites me in the same way it bites everyone. "Why me?" I asked. The answer came back, "Why not you? Did you think you were immune?" I was talking like that foolish woman in chapter 2 of the book of Job. Shall I accept good from God, and not trouble?

My friend Steve understands this trouble all too well, and he is not immune from the "Why me?" question. Yet he is able to live a life of rejoicing because he understands Christ's promises better than the trouble.

This present reality is not the sum of all that we are, and this life of struggle and corruption is not our ultimate destiny. For the Christian, there is so much more to come.

This is an edited extract from Scott Blackwell's book Healed at last: Separating biblical truth from myth, published by Matthias Media. Scott is also rector of the western Sydney parish of St Clair and Erskine Park.



The reason for faith

We believe, and we rejoice. **ANDREW LESLIE** explores how we can know that what we have placed our faith in is something we can stake our lives and future upon.

TO BE HUMAN IS TO HAVE FAITH. THERE IS NOTHING PARTICULARLY REMARKABLE about this, of course. Faith is at once both utterly inescapable and entirely mundane. Every time I drive my car, I have faith that other drivers know the road rules at least as well as I do. Each time I go to an ATM to withdraw money I have faith that the bank has not squandered away the little I have entrusted to them to protect and use on my behalf.

Faith or trust is essentially a conviction that a certain claim or testimony about an object is true (or, at least, true most of the time). I may not possess an inside-out comprehension of that object to know its truth from first principles, as it were, but I can believe a testimony about it to be true.

So while I will never thoroughly know how much each road user has grasped the rules, I can believe that someone is only licensed to drive once they have passed a test about those rules. While I will never thoroughly understand the way my particular bank operates and uses my money, I can trust it is subject to prudential regulations that guard the financial interests of its customers.

Faith is, of course, no less essential to human relationships. A functional democratic society relies on each citizen putting their cynicism to one side and voting to elect the party whose claims they believe to be more or less true, most of the time. A happy marriage relies on each partner trusting the promises of the other. This is why we are so outraged when a politician's claims or a spouse's promises turn out to be untrue: we have relied upon, perhaps even staked our lives upon, a falsehood.

But the point is, whether or not a person's claims turn out to disappoint us, without faith in the first place the very possibility of a functional relationship is undone. As long as I lack omniscience, faith is a daily necessity. Without it I would quickly find myself paralysed by an inability to do pretty much anything. Indeed, only God has no need for faith, because only he knows all things inside out.

None of this is to say, however, that faith needs to be somehow irrational, a blind "leap in the dark". Faith may lack a comprehensive knowledge of its object, but unless it is pure folly, it typically can see enough evidence to know that the testimony about it is, at least, likely to be true. It is more than a mere opinion that cannot commit firmly to one position or another. Rather, it is informed by certain rational – if admittedly fallible – judgments about the "credibility" of the testimony it believes.

So, for example, I have no trouble believing what my wife says to me. It is more than a mere hunch or opinion. But the reason I can believe my wife is because I know her to be trustworthy. And that knowledge has arisen through years of experiencing the very evidence of her trustworthiness first hand.

Perhaps the reason why dependence on another is so basic to human flourishing is because we were ultimately created for joyful dependence on The Other who made us. To be human is to have faith, not just in the things and people around us, but chiefly and finally in our maker, God. We may not have been made to possess a comprehensive grasp of everything true about him, as if we could know God as clearly as he knows himself. But we were made to trust a particular testimony about him; that he is the "God of truth" (Deut 30:4), who "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2).

And to trust this testimony about God is no stab in the dark. The Bible says there is ample evidence within God's world to *know* this testimony is entirely trustworthy and true. The trouble is, sin has hardwired us to disbelieve this testimony in place of one that is patently false: "God is untrue" or "God is a liar". And whatever knowledge we have to the contrary we have universally managed to suppress (Rom 1:19-21, 25).

At the heart of Christian faith, however, is a conviction that in Scripture, God has broken into this world with another testimony. This testimony carries no less authority than what is woven into creation itself, but it speaks of something entirely new; salvation for sinners in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But how is it that Christians arrive at the conviction that this testimony is, indeed, true and divine? No doubt we could marshal all kinds of "evidence" to support this distinctively Christian faith, what older writers have sometimes called "motives of credibility". Indeed, Christians have done this for many centuries.

We might start by pointing to the relatively obvious: Scripture itself claims to speak on behalf of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). We might notice how even Christ, the Word made flesh, readily submitted to Scripture's divine authority. We might point to the relative antiquity of the Scriptures, their internal coherence, or their accurate preservation over many centuries. We might point to the testimony of the Church throughout Christian history. We might take confidence in the considerable historical scholarship attesting to the overwhelming probability of Christ's resurrection as proof of Scripture's claims.

But there is a problem here. As useful and, perhaps, convincing as these arguments may be, there is always a counter-argument. In *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins undoubtedly speaks for many in dismissing the Scriptures as "a chaotically cobbled-together anthology of disjointed documents, composed, revised, translated, distorted and 'improved' by hundreds of anonymous authors... spanning nine centuries".

While I may ultimately judge his argument to be unconvincing, humanly speaking how can I be absolutely *sure* that I am right and he is wrong? After all, human judgment is demonstrably fallible. Worse still, it is crippled by that hard-wired resistance to divine truth. In other words, if these kinds of arguments are necessary for Christian faith, that faith itself would in large part hinge upon a person's wherewithal to rise above their own fallibility and sinful frailty. We could no longer say that salvation – by faith – rests upon divine grace alone.

So how is it, then, that I can come to know *for sure* that the testimony of Scripture is truly divine, so that I may believe it and stake my life upon it? Long ago, John Calvin recognised the problem and wrote: "If we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences – that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, and that they may not also boggle at the smallest quibbles – we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures".

Arguments and proofs have their place, particularly when defending the Scriptures against unjustified attack or strengthening the convictions of those who *already* believe. But what Calvin realised is that if our salvation depends on God alone, so too must our belief in the divine testimony of salvation: "only those to whom it is given", he writes, "can comprehend the mysteries of God (Matt 13:11)". From this Calvin concludes that at the same time he draws someone to saving faith, God himself must also graciously communicate the infallibly certain foundation or "evidence" their faith requires, which is no less than his very own divine authority.

Indeed, Calvin attributes the unique certainty of Christian faith to the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit: "God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts through it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets, must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."

But doesn't this sound rather like an irrational appeal to the inward, unverifiable religious experience – a spiritual leap in the dark? Certainly, within the next century or more, this is precisely the charge this claim would face from Catholics and Protestants alike. For many, a faith that proceeds from "motives of credibility" or the testimony of the Church seemed like a far safer and more sensible way to proceed.

But as the great English Puritan John Owen recognised, Calvin really means no more than to say that the evidence upon which a person recognises the voice of God in Scripture is found nowhere other than in Scripture itself. After all, Scripture often likens itself to a "light" (Ps 19:8, 119:105, 130; Prov 6:23; Hos 6:5; 2 Pet 1:19). And to risk stating the obvious, Owen reminds us in *The Works* that, "light requires neither proof nor testimony for its evidence. Let the sun arise in the firmament, and there is no need of witnesses to prove and confirm, unto a seeing man, that it is day".

In other words, light itself possesses its own inherently compelling testimony: it is not reliant on any argument we might construct about it. Similarly, Owen says, Scripture itself contains ample evidence for the truth of its divine testimony. Through his Spirit, God has left his glorious, indelible and authoritative mark on Scripture no less than he has on creation itself. The trouble is, as Owen puts it, "light is not eyes". No amount of light can alone make people who are "stupidly blind... comprehend it (John 1:5)".

Hence, in bringing someone to faith, it's not that the Spirit somehow whispers a hidden secret into their ear: "the Bible is true"; he simply illumines their mind with the word's own light which it otherwise cannot see or rationally comprehend in its natural and fallen state.

Certainly, Owen admits, it may ultimately defy us to know precisely how the Spirit works by the word in bringing someone to faith, but each believer ought to know that they can say with the blind man, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

In his own context where this kind of explanation for Christian faith was up for grabs, Owen, like Calvin before him, recognises its vital theological and pastoral significance. In many ways, a believer in late 17th-century England was no less inundated by objections to their faith than we are. He wrote that "many are often shaken in their minds with those atheistical objections against the divine original and authority of Scripture which they frequently meet... and know not how to extricate themselves from the ensnaring questions that they are often attacked withal about them".

And in that bewildering religious context, it is vital that every Christian knows the true "reason" for their faith. Why does a believer come to trust the Scriptures as the life-giving word of God? Not because of some ratiocative opinion, as if that is the best one can or should ever expect, nor because of some secret divine voice or whisper. It is simply because in them, by faith, they come to recognise its own distinctive "light" and experience its irresistible divine power, which is no less than the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). ☪

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The dangers of digital church

Podcasts might be a great tool, but don't kid yourself that long-range teaching can take the place of a real church community, writes **SCOTT MONK**.

THE MEGACHURCH JUST HAD TO BE UBER-COOL: IT WAS PAINTED BLACK. NOT THE skivvy black favoured by fashion designers, but charcoal like a remains of a cooling campfire. A street sign in the shape of a crucifix hung from the outside wall of the converted warehouse in Seattle's industrial suburbs and bore the words "Jesus Saves". To get there you had to hurry past the homeless people permanently mushroomed under a freeway overpass, but that edginess gave attending the church extra street cred.

Inside, there was a lounge setting – again, black – and a faux fireplace that intimated they were more shopfront props than a greeting area. No one sat. No one lingered. With only two minutes to spare, a young welcomer gave a curt hello to our party of four from Sydney, then ushered us into the world-famous Mars Hill Church.

As far as the eye could see, there was an expanse of comfortable seats – all black. Out of an estimated 2000 chairs available, only 30 per cent were filled. Maybe parishioners here arrived fashionably late. Maybe it was the summer holidays. Maybe it was the 7pm service. Maybe Seattle was still greatly unchurched. Or maybe the series of public stumbles by Mars Hill's figurehead Mark Driscoll had thinned the ranks. Maybe.

A hipster with an epic beard and shaved head tested the upper levels of human hearing with the first few guitar riffs as about 40 young adults hurried in late to join the rest of the singing congregation. The songs were the same mixture of contemporary and garage hymnals heard across Sydney churches every weekend.

The service leader stepped up and warmly welcomed everyone for the night. The audio-visual team, all dressed in black, zoomed in on him as he set the stage for Driscoll to appear and preach on Acts. There was no hint of nervousness about allegations of plagiarism or a pressing need to answer why senior staff had left. This was church. We were all here to hear the word of God. Amen.

When the service leader merged into the shadows, we all sat up in our seats. We wanted to see and hear for ourselves the man himself, who had not only shaken up the religious landscape of America but lit firecrackers under the seats of Sydney Anglicanism in 2008 with his pointed 18 obstacles to effective evangelism that he believed were choking ministry and the laity.

I'd seen him preach once at St Thomas', North Sydney on that same tour, when the towering minister Simon Manchester had introduced him to a packed congregation as Christianity's version of comedian Jack Black. If Manchester had been a circus act right at that moment, he would have been tied to a spinning wheel because the normally jokey Driscoll was throwing plenty of daggers.

Back then, Driscoll had entertained us with his normal routine: lambasting us single Christian "boys" for not marrying the amazing Christian women sitting among us, who were all allegedly standing at the altar waiting for the first "real man" to come along. The belly laughs had rolled back then but over the years, as the quest to find a wife became a lonely and confusing road for me, his tired one-liners felt like spears thrown at the soul.

But here in Seattle, this was an opportunity to see the man in his own backyard. A question that had nagged me about his vodcasts would finally be answered: why do you never see his congregations?

The lights dimmed and suddenly a digital Driscoll flickered to life on five giant screens, broadcast from a place far, far away. My companions and I looked at each other: were we at a church or a movie theatre?

After almost an hour of staring at those five giant screens, listening to a sermon that had little to do with expository teaching, they faded to black. There were two more songs and an invitation to join communion at the front. There was no reading of the Bible beforehand or "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" – just a queue.

Once the main service ended and the auditorium quietly emptied, my friend challenged us to meet our brothers and sisters over supper. We walked into a large coffee room lined with spoons, sugar and mugs – but no people. Maybe it was getting late. Maybe they'd shared coffee before the service. Maybe.

After being challenged by a security guard for looking at the deserted children's area – but not for taking photos, which is what the sticker warned against near the front doors – we passed a black mailbox squatting in the corner like a bulldog, its maw hungry for donations. We'd learn later when reading the church's annual report that the mailbox was mostly decorative. A sizeable chunk of donations to Mars Hill come from overseas – Christians like you and me listening to podcasts from our bedrooms, gyms, cars and loungerooms.

Don't get me wrong. This is not a piece written to kick Driscoll while he is down. He is a brother in Christ, albeit one who needs wisdom, repentance and prayer as his leadership is put under a very public magnifying glass. No, Mars Hill Church is a wake-up call for our digital generation.

Christians should never outsource relationships.

The lesson learnt from Mars Hill is that church isn't like wi-fi – an invisible and transferable connection. Whether you sit in the pews or stand in the pulpit, we as Christians must be in genuine personal relationship with Jesus and other Christians. Hebrews 10:25 is clear: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching".

Meeting with other Christians creates friendships, honesty, support and accountability. The "you" shrinks into unity. And unity is at the heart of community. School, sport, neighbours and workplaces may offer community but ultimately they're shallow and temporal. Church community, for all its flaws and personalities, aims to emulate Jesus by glorifying God, welcoming the stranger, mending the broken and loving those who think they're unlovable. It's encouraging one another because we need to be regularly part of each other's lives, just as Christ is in ours.

Mars Hill is missing that community. The church feels like a giant game of Guess Who? There's no way that Driscoll or his leaders could know more than a handful of the people at their scattered "campuses" and even fewer of their virtual audience. And if they've outsourced fellowship to Bible study groups, then they've outsourced their authority, too. Driscoll is no more than a talking head.

If anyone thinks this doesn't happen in Australia, they need to think again. Once, while visiting a church a few years back, a new minister's appointment was announced with great excitement. However, it was made clear he would only preach, and leave the pastoring to other staff.

In my mind, that's no different from Driscoll appearing on a projector screen. The man was separating himself from the people he had been charged to lead, reducing his role to a weekly motivational talk.

Churches should never outsource their leaders. They should never outsource personal relationships. They should never outsource communion to an individual worshipper. And they should think carefully about why they produce sermons for the wider world.

For the greater part of the past decade, many churches have established online sermon libraries. This has allowed Christians such as myself to be introduced to celebrity preachers such as Driscoll, John Piper and Tim Keller. Local pastors themselves even recommend podcasts, which in itself is no different from handing around cassette tapes of Martyn Lloyd-Jones or Don Carson back in the day when dinosaurs wore legwarmers.

However, little debate has been given to what impact this has on modern spiritual life as we quickly turn to trusting pastors who only know us as "Download + 1".

For many people, there's no problem in listening to downloads. There are excellent Christ-centred sermons produced by faithful ministers that help Christians who are sick, isolated, persecuted or travelling. It's when they become the primary source of a person's spiritual walk that they become a problem.

First, digital sermons can encourage individualism. Theoretically, a layperson doesn't ever need to step into a church again. It's easy to stay home on a Sunday and download podcasts to feel "churched" for the week. There's no commitment to serving, local outreach, fellowship or praising God through song if you don't leave your bedroom.

Second, it undermines the local pastor. Downloaded sermons are no longer just supplemental to studying the Bible. They've become challengers. A flock suddenly has 10 shepherds – most whose voices come from far-flung fields – to whose hands the different sheep go and nibble the sweetest clover.

Third, and leading from this, is no one polices the enormous library of digital sermons. Somewhere on Google, there are false teachings justifying every type of sin to lure people away from the truth. We know this is true because these teachings have infected not only the Western church but our own friendship circles.

A while ago, Driscoll's catchy slogan was: "Burn your plastic Jesus". Maybe it's time to "Unplug your digital church".

SERVANTS TAKE A BREATHER AT OXYGEN



The second Oxygen conference organised by Katoomba Christian Convention blew into Technology Park in Redfern last month with eight high-profile US speakers and hundreds of delegates from across Sydney and Australia.

Dr Don Carson, one of the founders of the Gospel Coalition and a favourite with convention goers, joined Professor John Lennox (who also spoke at Oxygen 1), Francis Chan, Nancy Guthrie and others for the four-day event.



Top: Three staff members from St Alban's Anglican Multicultural Bible Ministry (MBM) Rooty Hill, discussing the Oxygen talks: Alli Muscat (left) with Scott Lavender and Maggie Ha.

Middle: Colin Buchanan brought howls of laughter with his parody hymns about the eccentricities of churches, before making a serious point in "Beloved Holy Bride" (see youtube at bit.ly/oxygen14).

Bottom: Jodie and Mandy McNeill of Oak Flats parish were surprised on stage by Ben Pfahlert, national director of the Ministry Training Strategy. The parish had raised \$4000 for an MTS apprentice for next year and during the launch of the MTS Multiply 500 program, Mr Pfahlert presented them with a matching, giant-sized cheque for \$4000 from its own fundraising.

PHOTOS: Joshua Mikhael/KCC



WAVERLEY ANGLICAN TURNS 150

St Mary's, Waverley has recently celebrated 150 years of ministry in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

The church marked the occasion with three events over three weeks, including church services and a special event on the Blakett design of the church, featuring Sydney heritage architectural expert, Hector Abrahams.

"Spreading it out that way, we had more people come to church, a broader sweep, and we also had a huge amount of people calling in about marital records, and those sorts of things," says St Mary's parish administrator, Walter Glover. "It allows us to have a dialogue and connection. It doesn't change anything quickly, but it allows us to invite people and to connect."

Mr Glover says the celebration also turned up some tidbits of history thanks to the large number of parishioners and staff, past and present – including a catechist who worked at the church in 1970 before moving onto ministry elsewhere.

"We've got a couple of holy tables here – one which had apparently been in use all the way through and we had thought was the original – and a second we procured from the Cathedral, which is what we actually use these days," he says. "We thought that was the second table in the place, but we discovered from this former catechist that the side table we used was actually the original table that dated all the way back to 1864. We also have a King James Bible and *Book of Common Prayer* that were printed in England and were presented when the site was consecrated, and we have the Communion chalice and other items that were all originals as well, which we used for Communion at our celebration service – all of these bits of history that we either rediscovered in a way, or actually found out something new about."

For Mr Glover, there is a long history of Christian service to the community at St Mary's, one that stretches back to its 19th-century beginnings.

"We're very big on that here," he says. "In the incumbency of the current rector who is now leaving, we've broadened our contact in the community, we host community groups, we have a children's art class, and it's connecting, being relevant, in an area of Sydney that's not really part of any Bible Belt. On our celebration logo, we have 'Christ in Waverley, 150 years and onwards', which I think has summed up our role to this point. We've had generations of people who have come to this church, we've had children come back and chat because their parents came here, and I find that sort of continuity enriching."



