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Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS



Not at home in the body

TRANSGENDER AND THE CHRISTIAN

- + Church in the freezer
- & Find meaning in the mundane

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The principle that we are spiritual beings must be brought regularly to our commanders.

Bishop Ian Lambert

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“Expand now”, expert says

A CHURCH GROWTH EXPERT HAS told a Sydney conference that parishes need to anticipate growth in order to get past the “200 barrier”.

Gary McIntosh, professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Biola University in California, has analysed more than 1000 churches in almost 90 denominations throughout the US, Canada and Asia.

He told the Next Level conference last month that Sydney church sizes are comparable with the United States, where “the average church is about 90-100 people. I know you read the books from some of the megachurches, but there’s 0.5 per cent of all churches in the USA that would be above 2000. Most churches are much smaller.”

He said the barriers to growth were not scriptural but social, citing what he called the “200 barrier”. “Churches under 200 think of themselves as a family. Between 200 and 400 you are moving from being a family to more like an organisation and some people don’t want to be an organisation, so they resist the growth of the church above 200. In Scripture there is no indication one way or the other about size, so a large church can be biblical just as a small church can be biblical.”

The audience of more than 350 was comprised of ministers, assistants and lay workers who took part in Q & A sessions on subjects such as attracting, welcoming and integrating visitors as well as the age dynamics of parishes.

Mr McIntosh likened getting to the next level to driving up the Blue Mountains. “It’s not really trying to get through a barrier – it is recognising that God is blessing us, we are growing and we are coming to a point where there is another ceiling,” he said. “What we have to do is to give our church more energy in order to get up to the next level.”

“When we get there then quite naturally our budget, our staffing, our organisation begins to support that new level and we can stay up there just like if we drove up.”

His talk was punctuated with illustrations from the hundreds of churches he has consulted with that were facing “choice points”.

“Your church is what it is today because of the choices people before you made... and your church will be where it is in 50 years because of decisions made today.”

Mr McIntosh warned that once growth happens it is too late to plan. “We know, for instance, that to get over 200 most churches have to have two ministers. What most churches will say is, ‘When we get up to 250 we’ll hire the second minister’. Well, that won’t work. You have to hire the second minister first.”



Churches need to anticipate growth: Gary McIntosh.

Souls revived in Kirrawee



Community focus: a typical Sunday gathering at Soul Revival Church.

SOUL REVIVAL CHURCH, ORIGINALLY AN EVANGELISM AND NEW CHURCHES PLANT IN THE Sutherland Shire, has recently been made a parish in the Sydney Diocese.

The church was begun in 2012 by the Rev Stuart Crawshaw and the Rev Matthew Redmond, both formerly of Gymea Anglican Church. When the two left their home church they were invited by ENC and local bishop Peter Hayward to begin the plant in Kirrawee.

Mr Crawshaw says Gymea was very gracious in contributing 30 volunteers to begin the fledgling fellowship.

“Matt and I wanted to call it Soul Revival – which was the name of the ministry we were running at Gymea – because we saw it in many ways as a continuation of the work that had been done there,” Mr Crawshaw says. “We were interested in trying to start an all-stage, all-age church that was also inviting people who we had had contact with over many years to reconnect and be involved with this new community.”

The church formally launched with 80 people but now has about 310 on the roll – 230 of whom are adults. About a quarter of their number are either from non-church or “dechurched” backgrounds.

Part of the success of the plant, Mr Crawshaw says, is the way the church emphasises its all-ages nature, using that as a way to invite non-Christians.

“We do have some homogenous ministries targeted at specific ages and things like that, but the overall aim is to meet together in the church gathering at the weekend as all ages,” he says.

“We like to say that Jesus has an impact on everyone and so what we do is we make it something that everyone can be a part of and invest in. We have coffee together before the gathering, [meet] for an hour – which is essentially like any other church service – and then after that we have dinner together. “The idea is to focus on community rather than an event, and also have a way for people to invite non-Christians to this community, connecting with us as Christians and asking questions without having to sign up to everything we believe the moment they walk in the door.”

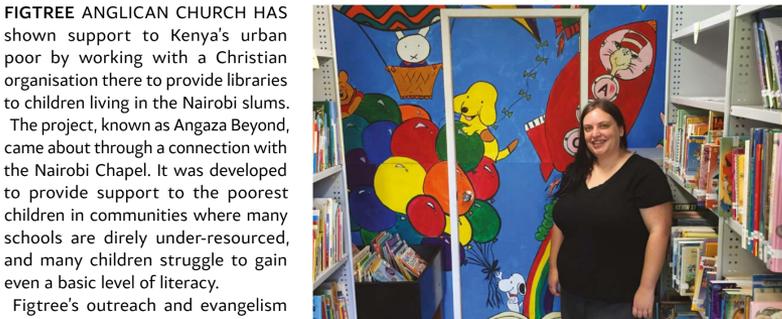
The new parish status was marked by a celebration Saturday, which Bishop Hayward attended. Mr Crawshaw says while there are obvious advantages to being a parish church, it was also a good way to mark the way the church has progressed.

“It means that we have Synod representation, parish councillors and nominators and things like that, of course, but it’s also just exciting to mark the occasion, how far we’ve come, and celebrate our Anglican heritage as well,” he says.

“We’ve only got about a quarter of the church from an Anglican background, so it was also nice to celebrate with the bishop as part of the Anglican family and have it as an occasion for people to learn a bit about what it means to be evangelical and Anglican.”

Soul Revival has also recently established a third church gathering.

Pop-up library for Kenya



FIGTREE ANGLICAN CHURCH HAS shown support to Kenya’s urban poor by working with a Christian organisation there to provide libraries to children living in the Nairobi slums.

The project, known as Angaza Beyond, came about through a connection with the Nairobi Chapel. It was developed to provide support to the poorest children in communities where many schools are direly under-resourced, and many children struggle to gain even a basic level of literacy.

Figtree’s outreach and evangelism minister, the Rev Lachlan Edwards, says the church “invited Pastor Oscar Meroo from the chapel here last year, and he said one of the key things people around him need is an education and a dream beyond their existence in the slums.

“When we heard this we thought, ‘This is actually something we could do’, by sending a container full of books that could be used by schools as resources – in a scenario where often they’re lucky to be able to provide a single book of any sort among 10 children.”

The project was quick to take off, with the first container sent in July. A further five containers are planned, taking in tens of thousands of quality book donations not only from church members, but from the wider communities of Figtree and the greater Illawarra.

“The church got on board very quickly and everyone’s been excited about it,” Mr Edwards says. “We were keen to not only get adults and kids to church donating books. We also wanted to use it in outreach by inviting people from the Illawarra region to get involved as well. The response has been exceptional.”

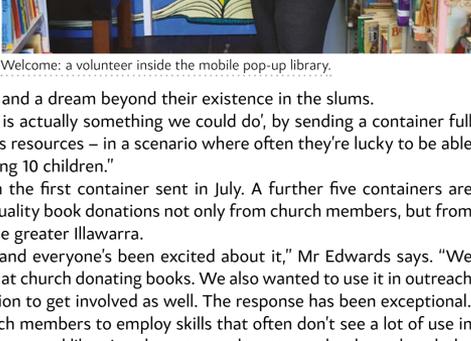
It’s also a project that has allowed church members to employ skills that often don’t see a lot of use in a church context. Painters, interior designers and librarians have teamed up to sort books and pack the container, but also upgrade it to a mobile pop-up library that will be almost entirely ready to use the moment the doors are opened in Nairobi.

“God raised up exactly the people we needed at the exact right time for this to really work, including seven retired librarians already in our congregation who had been looking for a ministry project to get involved in,” Mr Edwards says. “We’re very thankful for them and for God’s hand in that.”

Donations for the next container open this month. Plans are also being made to send staff and lay people to Nairobi to help establish the program, find other potential avenues of support and further develop the link with Nairobi Chapel and other groups in the city.

“We’ve given the librarians two weeks off and then the plan is to chuck them right back in,” Mr Edwards jokes.

“But in all seriousness, this has been a great project not only in terms of what can be done on the ground in Nairobi, but also for bringing our church and our local communities together. We want to keep going with that in partnership with Nairobi Chapel and keep working at what we can improve as well.”



Welcome: a volunteer inside the mobile pop-up library.

Questions for God

CHURCHES OFTEN HAVE EXTERNAL SIGNS WITH MESSAGES THEY WANT THE COMMUNITY TO see, but the signs aren’t usually interactive. The church offers food for thought, and that’s about it.

For the past three years, however, Church by the Bridge in Kirribilli has had a different approach. A chalkboard is placed out the front for a whole month, with an invitation for passers-by to write down one question for God. The most-asked questions form the basis of a sermon series the following month, with all questioners invited to come and hear answers.

“We do get stupid questions like, ‘Why did God create eyebrows?’ and others write rude comments,” says the senior minister of Church by the Bridge, the Rev Paul Dale. “But among the stupid questions and rude comments there are always genuine questions. Another interesting thing is that, because we’re on a main road, people always stop and look at the board and read the questions.”

The local bishop, Chris Edwards, has watched these board-community interactions first hand and is astounded by its popularity.

“I would imagine people walking by and thinking, ‘I’m not writing on that,’” he says, “and yet I was standing on the other side of the road having a cup of coffee with Paul and he said, ‘Just watch the sign!’ In a 20-minute period, six or seven people stopped and wrote a question or made a comment, and four to five times that many stopped to read what was said. And what they write is amazing.”

Mr Dale says why God allows suffering and evil is one of the three most popular queries, and this year “Is God anti-gay?” is also near the top of the list. Yet, he adds, “the most popular question for the past couple of years has been, ‘Why am I so unhappy when I have so much?’

“There were also a lot of questions this year on whether you can trust the Bible, and isn’t it just a book? But people are asking more about things to do with the meaning of life, purpose, identity – who am I? And what happens when we die?”

Mr Dale says the chalkboard is a good way for a church in a very visible position, like his, to engage with locals who wouldn’t ordinarily have anything to do with the church. But he stresses the importance of it being part of a parish’s wider evangelism strategy rather than just an idea on its own.

“It’s a link in a chain... but it puts God upfront and personal straight away. When people come [to one of the sermons] they are expecting to hear what God has to say.”



Church by the Bridge in Kirribilli has had a different approach: a chalkboard for questions for God.

95 reasons to celebrate the Reformation

MOORE COLLEGE HAS ANNOUNCED an extensive program of celebrations for the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Next year will mark 500 years since Martin Luther set the Reformation in motion by nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg church (right) on October 31, 1517.

“The Reformation of the 16th century was a hugely significant epoch and turning point in the history of the church,” says the Rev Dr Ed Loane, who lectures in doctrine and church history at Moore College.

“It is a period that continues to be formative for Christians today – even though many people may not realise this. That is one reason it is important to celebrate the Reformation... to raise awareness of what happened at that time and why what happened then is still important for us now.”

The celebrations will include two major rallies and a summit on justification by faith.

Former Archbishop Peter Jensen, as well as the Rev Dr Peter Adam and the Rev Simon Manchester, will lead the first “Reformation rally” in March, with Archbishop Glenn Davies and leading British church historian the Rev Dr Gerald Bray featuring at the second rally in August.

Dr Loane says events such as the summit and Moore’s School of Theology conference in September will be an opportunity to look again at what he calls “defining stands” made at that time on important theological issues.

“The Reformation continues to be of significance because the issues and theology that were rediscovered and cherished by the Reformers remain foundational for Christianity,” he says.

“Furthermore, the challenges to this theology remain – albeit under a transformed and modern guise – and thus knowing how those who have gone before us articulated this doctrine and promoted the faith will better equip us to face today’s challenges.”

The Lutheran Church plans to mark the anniversary with a year of celebrations including an official ceremony on October 31, 2017 in Wittenberg.

Ironically, next month Pope Francis will take part in an ecumenical service with the World Federation of Lutheran Churches. In June, he praised Luther’s “intentions” and told reporters, “Today Lutherans and Catholics, Protestants – all of us – agree on the doctrine of justification.”

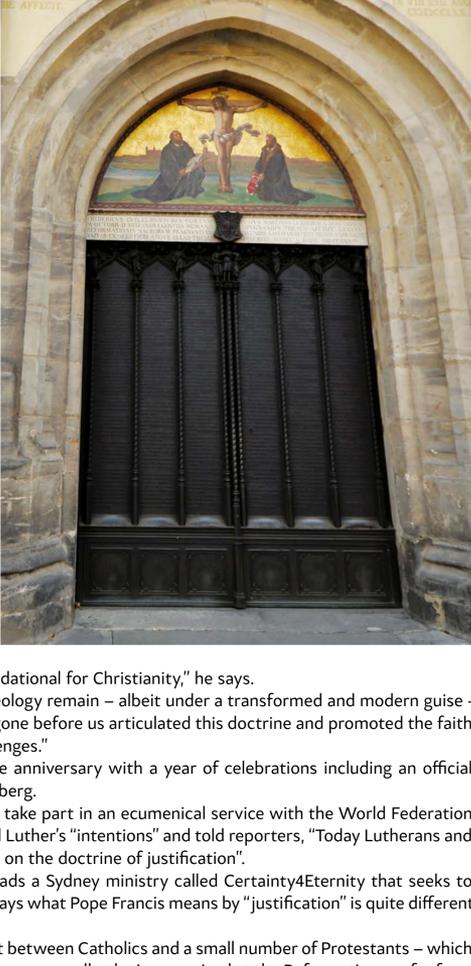
However the Rev Mark Gilbert, who leads a Sydney ministry called Certainty4Eternity that seeks to share the gospel with Roman Catholics, says what Pope Francis means by “justification” is quite different to what it meant to Martin Luther.

“Despite these statements of agreement between Catholics and a small number of Protestants – which really just obscure these important differences – sadly, the issues raised at the Reformation are far from resolved,” Mr Gilbert says.

“Having grown up in the Catholic Church, when I started reading the Bible with my Protestant friends at university I realised that God saves people who don’t deserve it, without their help. That means on a good day or on a bad day I still know with certainty where I stand with God, because being right with God depends completely on something objective – outside myself – on the sacrificial death of Jesus alone.”

Mr Gilbert is urging Anglicans to use the Reformation as a conversation starter.

“Why not ask your Catholic friend if they are certain they are going to heaven and, if they’re not, why not share with them the solution that Martin Luther discovered?” he says.



The door of the Wittenberg church, where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses in 1517.

Gospel's long reach with shortwave



Outreach from the outback: Reach Beyond staff and volunteers set up a third transmitter in June.

ST THOMAS', NORTH SYDNEY HAS PARTNERED WITH AN AUSTRALIAN BROADCAST MINISTRY THAT shares the good news of the gospel with unreached people groups across the world.

Reach Beyond Australia, with its broadcast base in Kununurra, Western Australia, transmits shortwave Christian programming in a variety of languages primarily to the Asia-Pacific region, particularly focused on unreached people groups in South Asia, Myanmar and Japan.

"Reach Beyond was one of the original Christian radio ministries, starting back in 1931 in Ecuador," says the CEO of Reach Beyond Australia, Dale Stagg.

"When Ecuador's site closed down about six years ago we took up the baton of being Reach Beyond's shortwave broadcaster. We broadcast for 11 hours a day and, over a week, would run Christian programming in 28 different languages – just from our one site.

"We always say that this is ministry on your doorstep. You don't need a passport to be a missionary with Reach Beyond and I think that's what makes our work unique."

St Thomas' became involved through a personal connection, with a member of the church at the time being the daughter of a volunteer at Reach Beyond's office in Melbourne. A visit from Dale Stagg led to the parish supporting Reach Beyond with finances, personal connections and prayer as a link missionary organisation.

The chairman of St Thomas' mission committee, Andrew Eatough, says, "We have a formal mission policy and part of that is to try and have diversity in who we support, to try and mirror the sense of the gospel message going out to Jerusalem, Samaria and the world. That also helps us have a wide view of all the things God is doing and, in this case, particularly what God is doing [in] the majority world."

While the idea of evangelism by shortwave is somewhat intangible, Mr Eatough says real stories from people who have been impacted by hearing the gospel through Reach Beyond broadcasts have helped to show his church the value of such a ministry, particularly because it jumps cultural and physical barriers in a way many other ministries can't.

"We've had the opportunity to hear from Reach Beyond workers and Christians from Delhi, who came over to build local connections and promote the work of Reach Beyond," he says. "That was part of what convinced us to be involved in the first place, and since then some of them have come back and done something of a deputation week with us – like what we would do with any other link missionary.

"When you learn about people hearing broadcasts in their own language from Reach Beyond and their local partners in Delhi, and about people visiting the studio there to learn more about Jesus, it helps to make it tangible and real and shows how God does work through ministries like this."

Individual members of the church have also visited Kununurra, seeing the site and helping with odd jobs. There has also been talk of sending an organised short-term mission team, although Mr Eatough says no firm plans have been made.

Bonded by faith



Bishop Lambert (centre) gathers for prayer with US and Australian chaplains. PHOTO: Staff Sgt. Victor Joecks, US Army

THE ANGLICAN BISHOP TO THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE, THE RT REV IAN LAMBERT, HAS visited his American counterparts at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait.

Bishop Lambert was in Kuwait to support and check on the spiritual welfare of Australian Defence Force members who are deployed in the Middle East and took the opportunity to meet with two US Army Anglican chaplains – Lieutenant Colonel Dan Knaup and Captain Ian Burgess.

Among the subjects discussed were the challenges and rewards of being a military chaplain, how the chaplain corps is structured in the United States and the methods its chaplains pursue to ensure soldier care.

Bishop Lambert, who had 20 years of active service in the defence force himself before going into ordained ministry, was accompanied on the visit by two other Australian chaplains – Captain Murray Lund from the Navy and Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Gibson from the Army.

The chaplains agreed that caring for a service member's spiritual wellbeing is an important key to preventing suicide, which is a significant issue among military veterans. "The principle that we are spiritual beings must be brought regularly to our commanders," Bishop Lambert said.

Lieutenant Colonel Knaup added that spiritual strength was one of the five pillars of the US Army's current resiliency training.

He then passed out Army "ACE" cards – a tool for suicide prevention that encourages soldiers to Ask, Care and Escort battle buddies with suicidal thoughts – to the Australian contingent.

Said Captain Burgess: "I was glad to see Chaplain Lambert's concern for service members. It's great to see that in Australia that they're using some of the same programs – like the ASIST [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training] program – and that's bearing results there."

Bonded by faith, the chaplains closed their time by praying for peace, and also prayed for protection and courage for service members of coalition and partner nations.

Abuse commission in Newcastle

THREE FORMER BISHOPS OF NEWCASTLE HAVE GIVEN EVIDENCE AT A SPECIAL HEARING OF THE Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The hearing has been told of systemic failures to properly handle child abuse complaints in the diocese and claims of a culture of protection of clergy facing allegations of misconduct.

Part of the proceedings was given over to questioning a former Newcastle diocesan council member and trustee, Keith Allen. Mr Allen was the solicitor for a priest, identified only as CKC, who was accused of sexually abusing an altar boy in the 1970s.

Counsel assisting the commission, Naomi Sharp, said Mr Allen's representation may have given the impression that the Church was supporting CKC in the legal process and taking sides against the complainant.

Mr Allen said he had only recently formed the view that it was "a bad look" for him to act as CKC's solicitor while he was a member of the diocesan council.

He was also questioned about so-called "brown envelopes" in which details of sexual abuse cases were kept. Under repeated questioning, he maintained the envelopes did not have details identifying the complainants or the alleged perpetrators.

This was challenged by later evidence from the director of the Professional Standards Unit for the Newcastle Diocese, Michael Elliott, who gave evidence that the envelopes contained documents and files detailing serious abuse.

Mr Elliott also spoke of the investigation into complaints about several members of the clergy, including the former Dean of Newcastle Cathedral, Graeme Lawrence.

Abuse survivor CKH told the commission he was 14 in 1980 when he was groomed and sexually abused by priest Andrew Duncan, then later by Lawrence and his homosexual partner Greg Goyette and two other priests – Bruce Hoare and Graeme Sturt. Police did not lay charges but a Professional Standards Board inquiry recommended that the priests be defrocked.

Former Bishop Brian Farran apologised to CKH and eventually defrocked Lawrence, Duncan and Hoare in 2012. Sturt's licence to minister was suspended for five years and Goyette was permanently banned from holding any lay office.

"What astounds me now is that these abusers could believe that it was okay to take responsibility for my sexual awakening and development when they had been entrusted with my pastoral care," CKH told the commission.

He said he found the current professional standards procedures in Newcastle Diocese "consistently helpful and supportive" and recommended they be strengthened.

On the final day of the first part of the hearing the Archbishop of Perth, Roger Herft, who was Bishop of Newcastle from 1993 to 2005, took the stand. He was questioned about why he did not report to police various allegations about priests in the diocese, including notorious paedophile Peter Rushton, who died in 2007 without being convicted.

Bishop Herft said, "I have asked myself a number of times: why was I not more alert? Why weren't the people around me more alert? Why weren't the other archdeacons outside of the particular group that we have spoken about more alert? I struggle to find an answer for that. But I agree with you that, at that particular point of time, I should have acted more effectively and well, and I did not."

Seafarers locked out of Carnival

THE MISSION TO SEAFARERS HAS been prevented from providing services and chaplaincy to ships run by cruise line operator Carnival Australia.

According to the principal chaplain of the Mission to Seafarers, the Rev Ian Porter, one of his chaplains was initially prevented from boarding a Carnival cruise liner without prior notice in October 2015. Mr Porter said it was reported to his chaplain that he was not allowed on to visit crew because he had been "preaching".

"We want to engage people in spiritual conversation and the like, of course, but we don't harangue people or chat to those who aren't interested,"

he says. "We respect any decision they make, of course, but we're not really sure what happened. We weren't given any warning and were later told it was a long-term policy around security – which seemed to us to be at odds with the way it all happened quite quickly and without explanation."

Mr Porter says he met Carnival's CEO and operations manager at a function in March and they were initially unaware of the issue but, after following up, said it was due to a change in their general access policy.

A spokesperson for Carnival Australia said in a written statement that, "The Seafarers' Mission remains welcome on our ships but we must comply with the requirements of the modern security environment. We have offered to pass on messages from the Mission and, if the ship/crew would like a visit, we are happy to organise it based on international security protocols. It also must fit with the operational requirements of the ship on the day."

Mr Porter says no avenue to pass messages or support services to crew on Carnival liners has been made available. At time of writing, no further attempt by Carnival to contact Mr Porter had occurred.

He adds that no other operators have declined to allow the Mission access to ships at dock, and that Mission chaplains have always complied with any security criteria or other protocols required for access.

Mission to Seafarers provides chaplaincy and support services to ship crews, particularly those at sea for long periods of time. In addition to on-board services, it also provides support at its offsite ministry centre, which includes money exchange, phone cards and free internet access.

Carnival is the parent company of a number of luxury brands including Cunard Line – operator of the Queen Mary and QE II liners.



Carnival's Pacific Pearl in Sydney Harbour. PHOTO: Carnival Corp

Chibok girls seen



In prayer: Dorcas Yakubu's mother. PHOTO: Pathfinders Justice Initiative

MANY OF THE NIGERIAN SCHOOLGIRLS who were kidnapped two years ago from a government secondary school in the country's northeastern town of Chibok have been seen in a video released by the terrorist group Boko Haram, raising hope they may eventually be rescued.

A total of 276 girls were kidnapped in April 2014, although some escaped into the bush soon after and one was found in May this year.

The video shows a masked man wearing camouflage flanked by dozens of young women wearing headscarves. A young girl was interviewed and identified by a name given to her by her captors but it has now been confirmed she is Dorcas Yakubu, who was 15 when she was taken from the Chibok school. Her mother Esther identified her and about 20 other girls.

"When I saw that video, I am very sad because this is my baby standing there with someone holding a gun," Esther Yakubu told CNN. "I give God the glory that she's alive. This video gives us hope that our daughter can be rescued."

Mrs Yakubu says the family prays

constantly for Dorcas and has urged the government to do more to secure the girls' release. She says the video gives them fresh hope, "because as long as she's alive, we will see her one day".

The terror group claims some of the girls have died in airstrikes and has demanded that captured Boko Haram fighters be released in return for the remaining hostages. The video shown was purported to be bodies of the victims. But the Nigerian Air Force has denied the claims, saying their precision strikes target only fighters and called the claims "a ruse".

Olatunji Olanrewaju, one of the leaders in the Bring Back Our Girls group – which started in the Nigerian capital of Abuja before spreading around the world to press for the girls' release – described the video as "blackmail" but said it also created the possibility for dialogue. However, Boko Haram is in the middle of a leadership struggle, which officials say may make it harder to negotiate for the schoolgirls' release.

IN BRIEF

ISRAEL: Archaeologists in northern Israel have uncovered the ruins of a rural synagogue – the first time one has been found that dates back to the 1st century. Dr Mordechai Aviam and a team from Kinneret College discovered the foundations during a dig at Tel Rekhesh, near Mount Tabor in the lower Galilee area, about 17 kilometres east of Nazareth. The building, in what was an ancient Jewish village, measured only eight metres by seven metres.



Researchers at the Tel Rekhesh synagogue site. PHOTO: Tenri University delegation

"This is the first synagogue of its kind in the Galilee villages," Dr Aviam told YNET news. Previously, synagogues from that time had only been found in cities. The remains show large foundation pillars and benches made from expensive white ashlar stone.

"The New Testament describes how Jesus delivered sermons in a synagogue in Capernaum and other synagogues in the Galilee," Dr Aviam said. "This makes the place very important for Christians."

ALGERIA: A Christian man has been jailed for five years and fined heavily for blasphemy in this Islamic North African country.

Forty-nine year-old Slimane Bouhafis was arrested in the Kabylie region, which is home to most of Algeria's minority Christian population. He was accused of describing Islam as "a lie" in a post on social media. The Protestant Church of Algeria says it will give legal assistance to an appeal against the verdict and the sentence, which was the maximum that could be imposed.

UNITED STATES: Evangelical author and activist Tim LaHaye has died at the age of 90. Dr LaHaye was one of the backers of the Moral Majority movement created in the 1970s by his friend Jerry Falwell. His wife Beverly, who survives him, founded the lobby group Concerned Women for America.

Dr LaHaye's early writings included relationship books such as *The Spirit-Controlled Temperament* and *The Act of Marriage*. However, in 1995 he released the first of the *Left Behind* books – works of fiction with pre-millennial themes – which have sold 62 million copies to date and have been made into movies and TV shows.

More than one uniform

I agree with Mr Bonsall-Boone (Letters, SC, August) – what clergy wear is important as it communicates who they are. But I must say that externals such as clothing are not the only way we communicate who we are. There are words and character as well (Rom 13:14).

As a rector I am very careful that my dress reflects my office and is sensitive to the situation. I wear whatever makes the gospel work: jeans and T-shirt to preach to the young, dog collar and surplice for the traditional, flannelette shirt for working bees, a wetsuit for my secular dive buddies, the character of Christ always.

Sydney clergy, like the police and military, wear more than one uniform.

Denis Oliver
Penshurst



Sovereignty plus responsibility

Help is available for James Moore's problem about God choosing our rulers (Letters, SC, August). Firstly, Romans 13:1 is clear: "The powers that be are ordained of God". They govern by divine appointment. But sovereignty does not override human responsibility: man by his actions fulfils the eternal divine purpose.

Christians, responsible to our divine calling, should be well informed politically in order to vote intelligently.

This calls for reading and, perhaps, making personal contact with our local representatives to inform them of our opinion. Some might decide to take an active political role, as did William Wilberforce, for example, with remarkable results.

Even more importantly, Paul (1 Timothy 2:1-3) urges us all to uphold our leaders in prayer. There was a time when Anglicans did this weekly, but apparently we now know better. Should the need or opportunity arise, we may also need to remind our rulers that God's appointing them to office is a prelude to the day when all must render an account before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Sixty years ago I was grappling with this seeming problem as Mr Moore is now doing. Courage, brother! Argument will not change one's viewpoint but the Holy Spirit can and does.

The book of Joshua is an excellent start. The Promised Land is God's gift to Israel. In chapter 1 he reminds them through their earthly leader that this is the fulfilment of the promise he swore to their fathers. Yet human responsibility means Joshua must lead in an intelligent way: spy out the land; deploy his troops; fight the battles and possess the land.

The twin elements of divine government and our responsibility are not opposed – they are, as C.H. Spurgeon used to say, "friends". Jesus endorsed this view when Judas betrayed him: "The Son of Man goes as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed" (Luke 22:22).

An excellent little book is Arthur Pink's *The Sovereignty of God*, which contains an explanation of human responsibility working harmoniously within the divine decree.

Donald Howard
Elderslie

As I read Archbishop Davies' article in July SC I was also unsettled by the inference that God chose our new PM. It was encouraging not only to read James Moore's letter, but also that SC considered it appropriate to publish.

Whether it be finding the car keys or selecting a Prime Minister, how we make decisions, both collectively and individually, is easily over-spiritualised. The idea that God is playing out a blueprint for the world order and our daily lives sits well when it's all going swimmingly. However, this theology can take us into dangerous territory when things are not going so well or events result in real human suffering.

To justify "blueprint" thinking we find ourselves coining limp and uncaring phrases such as "It's all in God's plan". Or worse, we can give oxygen to such notions that suffering is caused by inadequate faith, trust or prayer.

A more helpful biblical message is that God's will is for us to take on Christ's character as we face the uncertainties of life, all within God's wonderful, yet corrupted, creation.

Harry Satay
Woolooware

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SMITH JOINS CMD



After more than 15 years as rector of Naremburn-Cammeray, the **Rev Rick Smith** has joined the Centre for Ministry Development (CMD) to help train and mentor new parish rectors.

Calling it a "strategically important role" the acting co-director of CMD, Peter Mayrick, said he was "really excited to have Rick on our team as someone who is a pastor, who understands the pastor's role first hand, and will also continue our commitment to supporting pastors in theologically robust and evidence-based ministry".

Centre director the Rev Archie Poulos added: "With his experience as rector in a large parish, we believe Rick will be able to assist clergy in a practical way as they face the day-to-day challenges of leadership and, as he gets alongside them, to assist in their personal development and growth".

Mr Smith, who has had some ongoing health difficulties since being seriously assaulted outside his church in late 2013, says the initial part-time nature of the job suits him.

"It's a new role, so I will grow into it... but the goal is that it will be full time," he says. "CMD is working hard to try and do things to help strengthen ministries and sustain ministries. They've gathered together people with local experience [in the areas of] business, management and ministry and we're asking how can we serve in a way that's going to be helpful and see ministries be more effective?"

"The other aspect of the job I'm quite excited about is equipping new rectors. In the past, input and support... was varied, depending on the timing of their appointment and the location of their parish. And so our bishops, Ministry, Training and Development, Raj Gupta [rector of Toongabbie] and CMD have been working on a new rectors' program. It will be run over one to two years and offer more deliberate training and support.

"I'm looking forward to helping with this and I think it will prove to be an exciting initiative."



Year 13 fan

The **Rev Michael Williamson** will leave Shellharbour City Centre next month to become director of Youthworks' Year 13 program.

"We've sent more than half a dozen youth from here to do Year 13 over a number of years – this year my eldest son is doing it – so when the job came up it was already a program we were excited about as a family and as a church," he says. "To have an opportunity to make a contribution is a no-brainer!"

He knows it will be a wrench to leave Shellharbour City Centre, a 1990s church plant of St Paul's, Shellharbour that had become a provisional parish by the time his family arrived in 2004.

"It's a huge decision because we love this church, its membership and its mission in the local area," he says. "The way the church has allowed me to grow as a minister, has disciplined my children and loved our family, has been the making of us in so many ways. The church, too, has grown and matured during this time.

"Shellharbour City has become a full parish, has planted its own offsite congregation, which is now a recognised church... and it's also done other plants which are still under our wing. That's probably the most significant local change that's happened. Also from being a church interested in its own mission it now has a world mission perspective."

What Mr Williamson has seen in the parish's Year 13 graduates has made him even keener to broaden the program's reach – describing a maturity of faith in Year 13ers that is, comparatively, much slower in their peers.

"At that time everything changes – you change from being a child to an adult very, very quickly," he says. "Sadly, Christian growth is often put on hold for 10-15 years as we grow in every other competency in life.

"Year 13 graduates are thinking differently about basic issues of what it means to be a Christian in God's world, and especially what it means to be a servant in his church. Every one of them is challenged to become a servant to the church in ways that others have taken years to do. So to have the chance to increase the numbers who are doing that – to provide even more young adults who are fired up as Christian leaders and are ready to serve – is fantastic.

"I love that vision for the church."

SOUTH TURRA move

In June the **Rev Shane Dirks** became the rector of South Turramurra. He has spent the past four years as young adults minister and senior associate minister for discipleship at Castle Hill, saying there was "wonderful growth... I had the most fantastic staff team you could possibly hope for and I thought, why would anyone ever want to leave?"

Yet Mr Dirks became convicted that he should make himself available to be a senior minister. "I was in a fruitful ministry, had some wonderful resources... but my soul was saying, 'I've equipped you, shaped you and people are telling you that you should lead a church,'" he says. "When you put that together you realise you're not doing what God wants you to do."

He and his wife talked, prayed and put the future in God's hands. "I've never looked for a ministry job, I wait to be found," he says. "I said, 'Yep, I'm ready, you make it happen'. The next day I got an email from South Turramurra and I thought, 'Wow, you don't mess around, Lord!'"

Mr Dirks describes the church as "an exciting place to be. You feel like, because of the diversity of the people, that the Jesus known at St Philip's is big enough to unite people who are different. It's also a tremendously warm community. We've been so warmly welcomed and people are really saying, 'We're ready for the next step – equip us and show us a vision of where we could be – which is exciting.'"



Church in the freezer

DAVID MANSFIELD

CHURCH IS CERTAINLY MORE THAN WHO SHOWS UP AND WHAT TAKES PLACE FOR 75 MINUTES on a Sunday morning.

Perhaps for you this time is like the foyer of a home that leads to many of the other rooms in the house. From the threshold to the foyer and beyond you find fellowship, training, ministry, direction, discussion, challenge and comfort both in and well beyond Sunday morning.

However, for those of us who perceive ourselves to be time poor, the foyer might be it. And such may be our perceived time poverty that some of us only make it “home” every second or third week.

The time-poor argument may simply evaporate if the 75 minutes is so good it makes us hungry for more, so are we making it all that it could be? Are we making the most of all the gifts of the members of the family who love that home?

THE OTHER SIX DAYS

I know I’m not alone when I say that I identify more with struggle than victory, more with failure than fantasised success, and with moments of unguarded honesty more than over-guarded self-disclosure.

I want preachers to show me where the Spirit of God – through the word of God they are teaching me – has worked them over, brought them under conviction, driven them to repentance and poured God’s love and mercy into their hearts in overflowing joy, relief and renewed obedience. What impact has it had on the preacher for the other six days?

I want every aspect of the service to reinforce this word: segues, songs, prayers, confession and creed. The way we read and speak – as well as what we read, speak and sing – is crucial.

I want to hear from other brothers and sisters about how they are grappling with the challenges of living as a disciple of Christ in a culture of decadence, deceit and denial.

What would happen if family members shared from the front some of the moral dilemmas they face as they tiptoe near the thin grey line of ethical ambiguity, and sometimes touch it, or even cross it? Christian doctors and nurses have been telling me ever since the 1970s that they face issues like this.

Would not sharing this sort of stuff with the congregation across a range of professions help us all to connect Sunday with the other six days – and connect us more with each other?

With careful preparation and briefing between the preacher and the testifier, would such segments not truly illustrate the word, deepen congregational love, concern and prayerfulness and give everyone at church greater permission to drop their guard and be a little more authentic with each other about all their failures, wounds and worries?

Would not relational distance shorten, people warm to each other, conversations over refreshments go to a whole new level of depth, understanding and application of the Bible we have heard preached?

THE OTHER SIX GIFTS

The suggestions I have just made feed into my conviction about the wasted gifts we have sitting in the seats at church.

I have previously written that our churches have talent to burn. By that I mean there are very gifted people in the church family whose gifts could be enhanced and harnessed to enrich the lives of every member much more than currently happens in most church meetings.

When I observe the senior pastor lead, preach and also pray, I get deeply worried. Two out of three is a big enough concern. Three out of three sends off the sirens. Laziness? Authoritarianism? Self-perceived omni-competence?

My experience has been that our churches are filled with competent people whose gifts in public praying and leading will only augment the preaching ministry. But this is to barely scratch the surface of other gifts that could be unleashed.

People could share their lives in testimony segments – talking of coming to Christ or of specific examples of God’s sustaining grace in Christian ministry – in ways I suggested above.

I’ve always been a great believer in having a special five-minute segment during public meetings where there is an opportunity for this sort of thing. If time is an issue have five fewer minutes of singing, keep the notices to a disciplined minimum, or make sure the segues are sharp – without mini-sermons preambing every detail on the running sheet.

A church family of 100 adults will always have 40-50 members who are wise, prayerful, articulate and not preparation averse. They are legion and they are quietly champing at the bit.

Segments could be wide and varied: testimonies, struggle stories, book reviews, film reviews, social analysis, world news, special prayer focus, link missionary updates etc.

We could easily fill 50 Sundays without repetition or overlap. It just needs imagination and preparation. All these gifts are being well preserved in the freezer but let’s defrost the saints and serve them up for everybody’s edification.

THE OTHER SIX TRIBES

Here is where we need to get our churches out of the freezer.

We know that like attracts like. Kind attracts kind. Tribe attracts tribe. It’s why we’ve always divided down generational lines. It has determined your “church belonging” choices. Even in small towns where the generations meet together, it’s tribal – the tribe, or the common factor, being that this is the only church that meets every week. Believe me, if the country town church grew and split and started a second congregation, the temptation to divide down some tribal line (probably generational) would be irresistible.

My experience has been that, over time, tribes breed envy. When we are so like each other in socio/generational/cultural terms we focus on what others in our tribe have that we don’t have. But my richest experience of local church life has been when the tribes have reached across the divides, gone the extra mile and shared each other’s recipes.

When we focus on creating poly-tribal communities there is no end of mutual engagement, learning and sharing of our differences in our diversity/unity in Christ.

There’s no easy answer for how we can do this. Does that mean it sounds like too much hard work? Perhaps we should just wait for heaven when, together with brothers and sisters from every tribe and tongue, shape and shade, culinary and cultural nuance, we will be singing and sharing and eating and laughing at the great banquet table of the Lamb.

But if that’s going to be so good, so perfect, so worthy, so glorious, why not capture a taste of it now? Wouldn’t such an experience be worth all the preparation and hard work?

Let’s defrost the saints and set their hearts on fire for the other six days, with the other six gifts and to reach the other six tribes.

David Mansfield is the director of the Archbishop of Sydney’s Anglican Aid.

“
Let's
defrost the
saints and set
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fire.”



Future leaders

DR GLENN DAVIES

LAST MONTH I TRAVELLED TO JAKARTA TO SERVE AS ONE OF THE MENTORS TO 1000 younger leaders from over 150 countries who attended the Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering (YLG 2016).

The Lausanne Movement began in 1974 when Billy Graham called together global evangelical leaders for the first International Congress on World Evangelisation. It met in Lausanne, Switzerland, from where its name developed, and has continued to be a significant catalyst for connecting today's influencers for global mission with a fourfold vision: the gospel for every person; an evangelical church for every people; Christ-like leaders for every church; and kingdom impact in every sphere of society.

Two Lausanne congresses followed in Manila (1989) and Cape Town (2010), which have fostered global partnerships such as those among mission agencies and Bible translators. Directors covering 12 geographical regions around the world were established, as were more than 30 issue networks seeking to advance the gospel among oral learners, in diaspora communities, in the world of ideas and in every sphere of society including the marketplace, the academy and the public square.



Influence: delegates at the Lausanne Younger Leaders Gathering.

Apart from significant consultations over the years and the publication of Occasional Lausanne Papers, there has been a strong commitment to cultivating and strengthening the next generation of Christian leaders. YLG 2016 was the third such gathering connecting evangelical leaders aged 25-35 with mature leaders from around the world, to build up the next generation of influencers.

For every five participants there was a mentor who met with their "connect" group each day for 1½ hours. I was one of half a dozen Australians privileged to be mentors to these blossoming leaders. The first part of the day was spent in a plenary session where the Bible was central, with opportunity for Scripture engagement at a personal and connect group level. The content was then explained by a gifted speaker and application questions were explored again in connect groups.

With the general theme of "United in the great story", a theme of God's people in God's story from Genesis to Revelation was unfolded. Dave Benson, a lecturer at Malyon Theological College in Brisbane, was responsible for the program and Richard Chin, national director of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, was one of the speakers who delivered two excellent Bible studies.

Participants were encouraged to plot their storyline to reflect on God's hand upon their lives and where he might be leading them. As each person explained their story to their connect group, opportunities were created for listening, exploring, encouragement and advice in the group under the guidance of the mentor. Some wonderful stories unfolded. I had the privilege of having two women – one from India and one from Nigeria – and three men (from China, Germany and Syria) in my group.

Afternoon sessions provided opportunities for gathering by geographic region and attending issue-specific workshops with global leaders. Evening plenary sessions focused on 21st century mission with speakers such as Os Guinness, Ravi Zacharias, Becky Pippert and David Platt. Among many highlights were the presentations by two Chinese house church pastors and an Iranian woman whose suffering for her faith in solitary confinement was a challenge to us all.

A great success of the event was the opportunity for connection. The young Indian woman in my group has a dream to recover young girls from prostitution in her home city and establish an orphanage. I was able to connect her with another Indian woman who is working to recover girls from India's slave trade. The young man from China has established an organisation to assist Chinese students who have become Christian while overseas, but have difficulty finding a church upon their return. Participants were also encouraged to make connections with individual mentors for a one-to-one session. My own experience of these sessions was exhilarating, as I saw God at work in the lives of Brazilians, New Zealanders and Iranians, apart from my own group participants.

The development of young leaders, indeed the reaching of each new generation for Christ, is an imperative for us all. YLG 2016 was not just an event – it has spawned a new age of mentoring across the globe, with the vast majority of participants seeking longer-term mentors over the next five years. I have no doubt we shall see many of them as global leaders in the future, making their impact for Christ's kingdom.

A PRAYER FOR MISSION 2020

Our heavenly Father, fill our lives with the fruit of your Spirit, so that we may walk in joyful obedience, share your love by word and deed, and see Christ honoured in every community as Lord and Saviour,

Amen.

Transgender truths and trials

Amid public celebrations of gender fluidity the pastoral issues surrounding transgender need our understanding – and a loving response, writes

CLAIRE SMITH.

IN MAY 2014 THE COVER STORY OF *TIME* MAGAZINE ANNOUNCED THAT WE HAD REACHED a “transgender tipping point”. In sociology, a tipping point is where a minority gains enough support and acceptance to change the minds of the majority, so that long-held attitudes are rejected and reversed, and the momentum of change moves in an entirely new direction. It is where the experience of pushing up a hill gives way to rolling down the other side.

As if to make the point, a recent survey conducted in the United States by a Christian research group showed that opinions in the general population on the morality of medically or surgically changing genders are neck and neck. When the responses of “evangelicals” were excluded, a clear majority condoned changing genders (68 per cent).

It seems that Australia is no different. Our media is awash with sitcoms, movies, documentaries and interviews embracing transgenderism.

The federally funded Safe Schools Coalition material places the right of students to choose and express their gender at the forefront of school culture and condemns “heteronormativity” – the view that biological sex and gender are binary (male or female) and correspond, and that sexual relations are rightly between people of opposing sex. Catherine McGregor, the world’s most senior transgender military officer, was applauded in a Qantas airport lounge by a crowd of suit-wearing businessmen, and was a finalist for 2016 Australian of the Year for being a “diversity champion”.

Schools, university colleges and sporting clubs the world over are scrambling to develop transgender policies. Legislation is being challenged and changed. Doctors are working out treatment protocols. And some church camp forms now list a third “other” gender option alongside male and female.

These are new developments and, as the tipping point claim implies, they have left many of us feeling like we are playing catch-up. Everyone is playing catch up!

TRANSGENDER: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

For decades, the impact of feminism has made debates about gender and gender roles commonplace outside and inside the church. More recently, questions about human sexuality and same-sex relations have occupied us.

Yet, for all their differences, all sides in these debates have agreed that human beings are male or female and that biological sex determines a person’s gender.

However, it is this binary distinction of male and female, and the correspondence of biology and gender, that are in question with transgenderism – or the “T” in the LGBTI acronym.

Transgender is an umbrella term for people who were born either male or female, but whose psychological or emotional gender identity differs from their biological or birth sex to varying degrees. Transgender people want to express their felt gender through gender bending/cross-dressing and sometimes through cross-hormone therapy and/or sex reassignment surgery, to try to bring their body into alignment with their felt gender (NB. The older term “transsexual” refers to someone who has – or wants to – change their body).

There are two main groups under the transgender umbrella. There are gender experimenters, ideologues and activists, who challenge conventional expressions of gender and think that gender is simply a social construct, and chosen and fluid. By contrast, the second group has a binary view of sex and gender but experiences varying levels of distress from a felt incongruence between their gender identity and bodily sex. This article focuses on this second group.

Transgender is not to be confused with intersex (the “I” in LGBTI). Intersex describes those rare conditions where a person is born with biological or physical ambiguity in their sex characteristics, genes or anatomy. These are physical not psychological and emotional conditions. Accordingly, some people with intersex conditions do not wish to be identified with the LGBTI movement because their condition is biologically based and does not concern sexuality or gender identity.

I will not address intersex issues here except to say that although such conditions are rare we should expect to have those with intersex conditions in our church communities, and although they may choose to keep their experience private, our teaching and pastoral ministry must be sensitive to, and seek to address, their needs.

Be informed

Conference

Liberty Ministries Identity Conferences with Dr Mark Yarhouse (pictured)

Wednesday, September 7 and Saturday, September 10, 2016, Annandale.
www.liberty.sydney/identity/



Resources

- Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (IVP Academic, 2015).
- Christian Medical Fellowship Files, “Gender Dysphoria”,
<https://www.cmf.org.uk/resources/publications/content/?context=article&id=26419>
- “Gender Confusion: A Pastor’s Perspective” – April 2016 talk by Rob and Claire Smith for the Priscilla and Aquila Centre:
<https://vimeo.com/163143757>
- Christian website for transgender issues: <http://parakaleo.co.uk>
- The *Decency Doctrine* Committee and newly formed *gender issues subcommittee* of the *Diocesan Social Issues Commission* are preparing reports for Synod 2017.

24-hour emergency support

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

(NB. Both of the above are secular organisations)

NOT AT HOME IN THE BODY: GENDER DYSPHORIA

Gender dysphoria is the new medical term for the experience of clinically significant distress associated with a mismatch between a person’s biological sex and gender identity. It replaces the earlier diagnosis of “Gender Identity Disorder”, which focused on the incongruity or mismatch itself.

With the new terminology this mismatch is no longer considered a disorder, rather it is the distress associated with it that is the concern and focus of treatment. Thus, a person with gender incongruence but no associated distress is not thought to have a mental health issue, and the goal of treatment is alleviation of the distress rather than alignment of gender identity with biological sex.

There is currently no clear answer for what causes gender dysphoria, although it seems likely to be a combination of nature and nurture and the interplay of both. One thing, however, is clear: no one chooses to have genuine gender dysphoria. It is a deep distress that impairs a person’s ability to function socially, occupationally and in many other areas of life. Inasmuch as it is involuntary, it is a morally neutral condition.

How many people experience gender dysphoria? The exact numbers are difficult to determine, and there are wide variations in statistics, but estimates suggest that it is fewer than 1 in 10,000 adult males and 1 in 30,000 adult females.

Statistics for children are even more complicated. Some boys and girls express a desire to be the opposite sex or dress or act in ways not typical for their sex. Well over 80 per cent of these children go on to resolve their gender confusion and accept their biological sex before reaching adulthood. It is not known why this confusion resolves in most and yet persists in some others.

Either way, the current trend to allow and encourage children to change genders socially (name, pronouns, clothes) – and even begin medical intervention (puberty blockers, life-long cross-hormone therapy and surgery) – seems most ill-advised when gender issues do not persist in such a significant majority.

In *The Telegraph* 57-year-old British actor Rupert Everett recently said he is glad he is not growing up now, because he wanted to be a girl until he was 15, and nowadays he would have been put “on hormones” and “be a woman”.

There are also concerns about misinformation, peer pressure and social contagion. A Christian GP in a regional adolescent mental health clinic, Scott* has observed that the gender clinics, websites and forums his patients consult uniformly “promote concrete thinking about the need to transition”, but the young people themselves often have very unrealistic ideas of what is involved in medical and surgical transitioning to another gender. In many instances, too, these young people believe “transitioning will be a broad solution to all of life’s problems”.

Scott is concerned that many doctors feel pressured to facilitate gender change rather than looking at other treatment options. However, while some doctors aggressively try to stifle discussion and concerns, he believes the medical community is increasingly open to exploring non-invasive means of resolving gender dysphoria.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

While there are many reasons to be concerned about our society’s embrace of transgender ideology, there are also two upsides: we are now more aware of the great pain some among us experience, and we are taken back to the Scriptures to see how God’s word speaks to us on these matters.

The first chapter of the Bible tells us that God made humanity male and female, and that this binary sexual distinction is part of being made in his image and his good purpose for us (Gen. 1:26-28).

Genesis 2 develops this further, when we meet the first man and woman and they are joined in marriage. The correlation of biological sex and gender can be seen as the male and female of Genesis 1 become the man and woman, husband and wife, and eventually father and mother of Genesis 2 and beyond.

Male and female, man and woman, are equally blessed and charged to “fill the earth and subdue it”, yet they are different beings with different roles. And without this distinction God’s creation is not good (Gen. 2:18, cf. Gen. 1:31).

In the New Testament, Jesus affirms this distinction in God’s design as part of his understanding of marriage, saying “at the beginning of creation God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6-7; Matt. 19:4-5). At the same time, the Bible is not unaware of those who do not strictly reflect this binary distinction. In the same conversation, Jesus also mentions those who were “born” eunuchs (these would be regarded as intersex conditions today) or “made eunuchs by others” (Matt. 19:12).

These texts are indications of the sad reality that, since the Fall in Genesis 3, this creation and all human nature bear the scars of our sinful rebellion against God. The harmony of God’s creation has been lost, such that our relationship with God is now broken, as are all human relationships, our relationship to the created world and the wellbeing of creation itself (Rom. 8:19-26).

Our bodies are no exception to this. They are subject to frustration, death and decay through afflictions of the body and the mind.

But God’s intentions for us as male-men and female-women remain. We see this in the gendered relationships God established for human society: wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, nieces and so on; in Jesus’ affirmation of God’s original design; in prohibitions against blurring sex and gender distinctions through gender bending or adopting the appearance of the opposite sex (Deut. 22:5; 1 Cor. 6:9; 11:4-15); and in the Christ-church gospel signpost of human marriage (Eph. 5:21-33).

Our bodies, and what we do with our bodies, matter to God.

We are embodied beings, who come into being as we are formed in our mothers’ wombs, and who will inherit imperishable bodies at the resurrection of the dead. There is not a “self” that is separate from the body, notwithstanding that at death the body may be separated from the soul for a time until Jesus’ return (Matt. 10:28).

Love of oneself is the high measure set for loving our neighbours, which includes loving our bodies (Eph. 5:28-29). God made us a self-body or psychosomatic unity, even if we are not fully conscious of being so.

Yet there is an even more significant aspect of our identity. It is our relationship to God himself. Those who know and trust in Christ Jesus as Saviour are given a new identity: we are in Christ, and we are children of the Father. In this regard, there is in Christ neither male nor female, as we are all equally adopted with the full rights of sonship (Gal. 3:27-4:7). This does not mean the distinctions of male and female are gone, but that our heavenly Father loves us all equally as full heirs with Christ. He is our new identity and hope.

As those in the Spirit (Col. 3:1-10). We choose to put off the old self, with its sinful practices, distorted thinking, wrongful desires and idols. We are to replace deceit with truthful self-understanding and living (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 6:3). Instead of envy, we are to be content (Phil. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:6). Impatience is to give way to prayerful perseverance (Rom. 5:3-4).

This does not mean the burden of gender incongruence or dysphoria will be lifted. While nothing is impossible for God, reportedly complete relief from these experiences is uncommon if they persist into adulthood.

I said earlier that gender incongruence and dysphoria are not moral issues. As consequences of the Fall, they just are. No one chooses this and most sufferers would do almost anything to find relief from it. And it is here that questions of right and wrong come into play.

The current trend in treatment is to take steps – socially, hormonally and surgically – to change a person’s body so it aligns with their felt gender identity. But there is a firm minority opinion, including from those who pioneered sex-change treatment, that treatment should focus on the mind and seek to align the mind with the body, not body with the mind – not least because the attempted suicide rate among transgender people is considerably higher than that of the general population, and is not significantly decreased by sex reassignment. In fact, after transitioning some openly admit that sex reassignment was a false hope. There are also health risks associated with prolonged use of cross-hormone therapy.

Add to this the positive teaching of Scripture: the clear understanding of humanity as male and female in the image of God; the goodness of our bodies, entrusted to us by God; our nature as embodied selves in gendered relationships; the need for us to find our identity and contentment in Christ; and the expectation of this current life being one of groaning as we await our eternal clothing.

How to respond

The accepted wisdom is that if you’ve met one transgender person you’ve met one transgender person. This should caution us against having rules about what to do or not do. We’re all different, whether or not we have gender issues, and we learn to care for one another by sharing our lives together. The following suggestions are no substitute for that.

Do

- show love and compassion
- listen carefully
- be patient and committed to the person for the long term
- be companioned for the whole person and not just their gender issues
- offer companionship to the person and their family
- be aware that photos and mirrors may cause distress
- make it easy to come to church (e.g. gender neutral bathroom option)
- organise some mixed gender church activities (such as youth Bible study groups)
- encourage others to reach out, especially to children in mixed groups
- be committed to the goodness of God’s design of male and female
- talk to your children about these issues and share God’s wisdom with them
- focus on eternal matters

Don’t

- stare, exclude or isolate
- doubt, dismiss or minimise their experience
- make them into a celebrity or spectacle
- have rigid gender stereotypes, especially for children
- tease those who don’t fit gender, stereotypes, especially children
- make jokes about gender non-conforming people
- be ashamed to speak biblical truths sensitively

What about names and pronouns?

My own practice is to use the person’s preferred name, as I would do with anyone. Because of the distress it can cause, I avoid using gendered pronouns and titles for the person while I am with them and instead use their name.

AT HOME IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

I said above that the transgender social phenomenon is pushing us to re-examine the Bible for God’s wisdom and opening our eyes to the burden some people carry – including fellow members with us in the body of Christ. As someone who has sat in conversation with people experiencing gender identity issues I know the burden is real, and may even seem overwhelming.

But it is not a burden that must be carried alone. God has promised not to leave us or forsake us and gives us his Spirit in generous measure (Heb. 13:5; Tit. 3:6). And his word can be trusted. He also gives us Christian community, with brothers and sisters to help carry our burdens.

As with any burden or life circumstance, our ultimate goal is that people will know and trust the Saviour. Jesus is not about making gender-conforming people who do not know him: he came, and died, and lives (as a man) so that we might know him and have life to the full (John 10:10-15). And loving our transgender or gender dysphoric neighbour means sharing the love of Christ with them in word and deed, so they might come to know him, too.

This might mean getting alongside people who are quite different from us, but it will definitely mean listening to them, caring practically for them and loving from the heart. It will also mean telling them that the peace they are looking for can only be found in knowing Christ.

John Hilton (whose story I use with permission) knows this to be true. John lived for many years as a woman before he heard about the love of Jesus and was saved. He tells how, with the pastor’s knowledge, he was baptised as a woman complete with thick make-up. The pastor’s view was that the church accepted people as they came and it was God who changed people.

Some years later, John had a strong conviction God was calling him to give up his female identity and live as a man. He cried, “Lord, I can’t do that but ask anything else from me and I’ll do it”. Yet the conviction remained, and John knew what he had to do.

The years since have seen gradual rather than instant change, but John is now a much-loved husband and a humble testimony to the grace and power of God. He says, “I gave my life to Jesus and he made me into a man. I’m free at last”.

For others, the experience is with gender-conflicted children. Primary schooler Libby* wanted to be a boy from her earliest days. As a Christian, her mother Jane* believed Libby’s best interests were served by resolving this gender confusion and finding peace in her own body. But it was difficult to find doctors who had not embraced transgender ideology and Jane did not want Libby labelled, only then to grow into the label. Eventually, with help from their minister, they found a child psychiatrist willing to accept their beliefs.

They have worked with the doctor and Libby’s school to find ways of managing her distress, to encourage her connection with other girls and to break down rigid gender stereotypes. Sadly though, as a family they feel let down by church. Some people have made simplistic and insensitive comments about Libby’s appearance, and long-term relationships with possible role models like youth leaders have not happened.

To other parents and pastors Jane says, “It’s not a matter of forcing them out of it. It’s not something to be scared of or embarrassed about. God is big enough to deal with it, as with everything else”.

Both these stories tell us that faith in Christ is no instant solution to gender issues. But God is patient with us all, and so – in our love and care and expectations of those so afflicted – there is need for patience and wisdom: grace and truth.

We are in the midst of rapid social change but God’s word does not change and he does not change. If we are to navigate these times and offer hope to the world, and if we are to be faithful when these issues touch us personally, we must – with God’s help – hold confidently to the truth and goodness of his word and will, and gently help our sisters and brothers do so, too.

* Names have been, and gender may have been, changed.

Claire Smith writes as a Bible scholar and former nurse, as a loved one who is transgender. She is not a medical doctor, psychologist or counsellor and has no professional expertise in the treatment of gender dysphoria. Below are links to a range of references she has utilised for this article.

Reference links

- American Psychiatric Publishing – bit.ly/GDfactsheet
- Christian Medical Fellowship – bit.ly/GDCmf
- The American College of Pediatricians – bit.ly/GDacpeds
- LifeWay WordPress – bit.ly/GDLifeway
- “Transgender surgery isn’t the solution” by Dr Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Maryland. Written for *The Wall Street Journal* in 2014 and updated in May 2016.
- PLOS (science and innovation publisher)
- Long-term follow-up study of people after sex change surgery – bit.ly/GDlongterm
- www.sexchangeregret.com
- International Journal of Transgenderism: Onset of Type 2 diabetes with feminising hormone therapy – bit.ly/GDtrans



Meaning in the mundane

We're so used to attaching the worth of our lives to what we do – even what we do for God – but **CHASE KUHN** argues that we need to take a different approach.

HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT THE VALUE OF OUR WORK? THERE IS A TREND IN recent theology to locate the meaning of our work in eternity. If we, as God's people, do good things, these things will remain forever. So, they argue, do whatever you are doing with great heart because – ultimately – what you do will be a part of God's kingdom and the new creation. Others argue that the only thing that matters in our lives is how we use our vocation to advance the kingdom through gospel proclamation. In other words, our jobs and lives only matter so much as we can tell people about Jesus; everything else is just details.

My fear is that both of these positions are misguided. I am concerned that we have been looking for our answer in the wrong place.

Our question of the significance of work is most often raised in relation to the "stuff" of life – our status, our career, our spending, our giving, our doing, our location... and so forth. Our struggle is an honest one: we want meaning in the mundane. We live with anxiety about what we are doing and if it ultimately matters. This concern grows as we get trapped in a routine and seemingly dead-end nine-to-five jobs.

In fact, this problem extends beyond just the workforce; what of the stay-at-home parent, the disabled, or the retired? Where is meaning located in our regular vocation – be it formal or informal, professional or otherwise? The concern is a good one, but it is only appropriately sorted out once we have clarity about the primary issues of life. Meaning in our life is not found in the what, but rather in the who and the how.

Let me explain. The worth of our vocations is established not in what we do, but in whom we do it for. Our life belongs to Christ. We submit our lives to him, because he is our Lord and King. We are citizens of his kingdom. He may use our work in wonderful ways for eternal purposes, namely bringing people to know the gospel. But it also may be just "ordinary" and have no seeming eternal consequence. But the work we do, no matter how "ordinary", has great value when it is done unto the Lord.

The value of our work is established in the relationship we have with the all-glorious God and us returning glory unto him. In addition, the work we do now has a place in loving our neighbours in everyday ways. This is a part of God's good order for the world.

In thinking about these issues, it is important to consider how the Bible discusses continuity and discontinuity between this age and the end.

Isaiah 65:17-66:24 emphasises discontinuity from the past in the removal of wickedness. The newness is associated with the forgetfulness of the pain and problems in the past. Whether or not this is a literal forgetfulness is not central to the argument. Instead, what matters is that things will not be as they have been: marked by brokenness and death associated with sin. The future will be glorious because God will have finally judged the world.

In 2 Peter 3:1-13, the apostle depicts a future in which the current cosmos (specifically the heavens) are burned up and the earth and its works are exposed. This is an image of God's judgment, anticipating the day – a day which God is patiently withholding for the sake of repentance – when the entire world will be judged. The promised new heavens and new earth will be revealed, where righteousness dwells.

And that brings us to 1 Corinthians 15, which demonstrates continuity in eternity as Christians are raised in bodily form. The future of God's people is not one disassociated with their existence now, especially their bodies. Instead, God promises to raise believers in glorious bodies – bodies that have been transformed and renewed, fit for eternity. So in Revelation 21-22 continuity and discontinuity is foretold as the old heaven and the old earth will pass away, and the new heaven and the new earth will be joined together. The marks of this newness include peace, life, glory and perfection. No longer is there pain, weeping, or death because these all belong to the old order.

What characterises each of these chapters is the redemptive work of God in bringing in renewal. The old order – the world after the Fall – is judged by God, bringing an end to all evil and sin. The new order (new heavens and new earth) are where God's peace is perfected, evil is no more and people live forever.

The recent retrieval of a notion of continuity in the future is most welcome. The Bible is clear that what God is doing in the future in bringing about the new creation is not going to be from nothing – just as at the flood God did not completely start over. In fact, our resurrection is a great window into the new creation that God is bringing about.

However, what we must be careful to recognise is that the new creation is also disconnected from the current world in important ways. The new creation is a transformed world, which has been judged and thereby purged of all wickedness. This is not our work; we do not transform the world. To think we play a part in bringing in or establishing the new creation is to undermine the sufficiency of Christ's redemption. This is why the resurrection is so crucial for our understanding of this matter. It affirms continuity but also stresses discontinuity – like a seed being sown and growing into a plant – and ultimately is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Let's consider a practical scenario. If you are a dentist and seek meaning in the stuff of your work, you would need to find a way in which it has eternally lasting significance. You might argue that good teeth will be part of our resurrected bodies, or perhaps you share the gospel with patients while drilling their teeth and they can't escape!

The trouble is these answers either try to extend the worth of the work into eternity or manipulate the work to involve more than it does. But meaning is not in the stuff of the vocation, meaning is found in how you relate to God in Christ *in* your vocation.

In this instance, you can be mindful of how you love God in and through your work and honour him in loving others. Your work is a valuable part of what God has given us for living in this world, namely dental health. It is true that we will have real bodies for eternity – and they will likely have teeth (will we need to floss forever?) – but our preservation of dental health now is not a contribution to the new creation. I am thankful for this because I would like cavity-free teeth in eternity!

The key, then, is a matter of our ethic. Do we remember that all of our life is in Christ, that we belong to him and that he is our Lord? How then do we live? The answer is, unto the glory of God: loving him and our neighbours. The nitty gritty of what this looks like in each of our vocations is less prescriptive than some of us might hope. But this is part of living life prayerfully unto the Lord, under his shadow and in the fellowship of his people.

Does sharing the gospel have more lasting (eternal) effect than drilling teeth? Certainly. Is drilling a tooth less honourable to God? No, not when it is carried forward with regard to our relationship to him. There is meaning in the mundane when we remember that we live our lives, every aspect of our lives, unto the glory of the Lord.

It is important to add a qualification here for the sake of clarity. What has just been argued for is in no way intended to diminish the importance of gospel witness. This is the world's only hope of eternal life! In fact, humanly speaking, this is what remains unto the end. But it is important to disassociate our thinking about the value of work with a contribution to eternity, either materially or spiritually.

Sharing the gospel is an integral part of our love for God and love for the world, as in sharing the gospel we introduce people to the God who is love.

As people know God the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, they come to recognise their purpose or meaning in life, too – to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But we want to avoid any notion of second-class Christianity for anyone who is not engaged in "full-time gospel work" (Who does that anyway – does anyone only just share the gospel every hour of their working life?). All vocations have their value not in what they achieve but in how they are oriented.

The bottom line is this: our work is not insignificant in view of eternity, nor is its significance found in eternity; our work finds its value in how we relate to God the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. Ultimately, our work is an occasion for us to love and glorify our God, and this occurs most often in the way we show love to our neighbour.

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NIGHTS WITH INTERNATIONAL FLAVOUR



Feast and faith: international food night at Berala.

St James', Berala has been making inroads with the local community thanks to its multicultural food nights. The nights, which started as low-key pot luck events four years ago, have grown to be something of a fixture on the church calendar, with visitors a regular sight. Some have even become part of the church community.

The rector of St James', the Rev Mike Doyle, arrived at the church after the nights had already begun, and says he was encouraged by how effective and warm they were.

"I don't think I've ever been to another event where you have two non-Christians for every Christian for a total of around 130, and where almost the whole church turns up," he says.

"Over the past three nights, we've had about 24 people pray the prayer to become Christian. Now when you drill down that isn't always meaningful in the long term, but often it turns out to be. It also shows that there are connections being made that allow for long-term relationship and growth."

The nights, typically run twice a year, are informal but with an evangelistic bent. Church members bring whatever food they care to bring, and often the outside visitors – who aren't asked to bring anything – contribute just as much to the meal. The visitors also have a chance to hear a short message about God.

"We'll often have the Bible passage in as many languages as possible on the night, a simple talk about Jesus, but also a musical item or something like that," Mr Doyle says. "It's very much a see-how-it-goes kind of thing, but we do also look at it as being out-and-out an evangelistic event."

"It seems to work well, and importantly people feel comfortable not only coming to it, but inviting other non-church friends to it as well."

Jo-Ann Elvery, the church's outreach minister, was one of the parish members involved in the first international food night and also runs the church's ESL and refugee ministries. She says events like this are crucial in a suburb like Berala, which boasts a diverse multiethnic population, with many having no background in Christianity in their home countries.

"It's so important to be doing this kind of thing," she says. "The area is very multicultural and God has brought people from all over to our doorstep who are eager to hear more about Jesus."

"It's often just a way for them to connect with Australian culture at first, at least from their perspective, but I think often they're surprised themselves to actually be convinced by Christianity and about how it ends up changing their lives."

LEBANESE PASTOR SHARES SYRIAN SCHOOL TALE

Sydney churches recently had the opportunity to hear from a Lebanese Anglican minister who has made it his calling to minister to Syrian refugee children living in Lebanon.

The Rev Emil Bou-Rizk began the Good Shepherd School after returning from his work in Tunisia to visit family in Lebanon. While there, he saw a number of Syrian children in the area who were settled in nearby camps, many of whom had lived there in limbo for years.

"I saw children in camps, in tents and fields, insulting each other and beating each other up," Mr Bou-Rizk said in a video interview.

"They had no one to take care of them, no school or anything like that. I asked my brothers and other people about whether they were doing something to reach out to them. And they were not doing anything."

"So I prayed a very simple prayer as I was going back to Tunisia. I said, 'Lord, if you want us to be doing something in the life of these kids, please do whatever you want'.

And after that doors began to close in Tunisia and opened in Lebanon."

Mr Bou-Rizk initially helped by sourcing food and clothing for children and families, as well as helping access psychologists and other trauma services. However, he quickly found one of the biggest ongoing needs from parents was simply to provide an education for their children.

A makeshift school began in the garage of Mr Bou-Rizk's brother, but a demand for the service from parents has meant facilities are being expanded with support from the Diocese of Egypt and the Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid.

Eddie Ozols, Anglican Aid's project manager for the Good Shepherd School, says, "Many of the children haven't been to school or had any kind of schedule like that since the war started in 2011."

"I was there for a day in March to look at things and basically saw the Christian community providing for Muslim children and educating them – Lebanese people showing care to Syrians."

"Many of the teachers that they employ are actually Iraqi refugees from Mosul, so Emil has also been involved in pastoring them in lieu of any other church there to support them."

Mr Bou-Rizk told his story and that of the school to churches and conferences on a recent trip to Sydney.

Says Mr Ozols: "In a lot of ways he's pretty isolated where he is in Lebanon and has a lot of responsibility, so this was an opportunity for some spiritual renewal for him."

"But he also ended up talking at a couple of churches and conferences, and the impact his story had was pretty profound."

"It was a great opportunity, I think, for people here to hear from someone first-hand about the real needs of refugees overseas and the kinds of ministries people are involved in to try and meet that need."



Profound story: the Rev Emil Bou-Rizk (right) with the Rev Roger Chilton on a visit to Pymble.



Dragon buddy

JUDY ADAMSON

Pete's Dragon

Rated PG

IT'S A PLEASANT SURPRISE TO SIT DOWN TO A CHILDREN'S FILM THAT ISN'T CRAMMED with wisecracking talking animals, pop culture references (or double entendres) for parents, buxom leading ladies and brain-snapping plot twists. *Pete's Dragon* is an old-fashioned adventure story, told extremely well, that just happens to require a little belief in large, green, furry creatures that fly. How hard could that be?

If you've seen the twee 1977 musical film of the same name, remove it from your mind immediately. While this version retains the names of the main characters – Pete and his fiery best friend Elliott – the similarities end there. Thank goodness.

The action takes place in the 1980s in America's densely forested Pacific Northwest (as played by New Zealand), where cheerful old woodcarver Mr Meacham (Robert Redford) entrances local children with tales of the dragon he once saw as a boy.

"If you go through life only seeing what's right in front of you, you'll miss out on a lot," he says – in particular to his daughter Grace (Bryce Dallas Howard), a forest ranger who knows the woods well and dismisses his stories as, well, fantasy. What they don't know is that the dragon Meacham saw is still out there, playing chasings, hide-and-seek and numerous other happy games among the trees with 10-year-old Pete (Oakes Fegley).

Elliott rescued the boy six years earlier after Pete's parents were killed in a car crash – a touching scene that opens the film – and the pair have lived together ever since. Pete christens his green friend after the dog in his favourite story book and that's appropriate, as Elliott behaves very much like a family pet. He loves nothing more than being close to his human friend, is keen to play and please, stronger than he realises and has a warm rumble of contentment somewhere akin to a big cat.

We're given the hint that each is an orphan, as local folk history talks of dragons inhabiting a distant northern land. So, both have been separated from family and find home and safety together – until there is just a bit too much logging in the forest close by.

This brings eco-friendly Grace into the area, where she and her daughter stumble across Pete. The shock of finding a boy who has spent six years in the forest (great as that is) isn't nearly as big as the discovery, by one of the loggers, of Elliott – who is too concerned for his friend to use his handy invisibility skills. Consternation grows when Pete, who doesn't "know" what a dragon is, draws a picture of Elliott by way of explanation.

If someone had asked me at the outset of the film whether it was possible to get teary about the friendship between a boy and a big, fuzzy dragon I would probably have said "No". And then eaten my words well before the credits rolled.

That doesn't mean the story is overtly sentimental. It's not. Disney films can certainly play that card, but the no-nonsense country setting helps sets the tone here. These are just ordinary townspeople grappling with a local myth that has come to life before their eyes. The school bus will never be the same again!

One of the strengths of *Pete's Dragon* is that the action is driven almost solely by the characters. There is very little technical whizzbangery (if you discount the CGI used to create Elliott). No intergalactic explosions. No sexual tension or romantic subplot. No swearing or nudity – and almost no violence of any kind.

What we are shown is the abiding importance of love and belonging, with a sprinkle of wonder and magic on the way. It's a delightful, uncomplicated tale in which every child (and maybe some of the adults) can go home wishing they had a friend like Elliott.