

JUNE
2015

Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

All in the family

REAL CHRISTIAN MINISTRY TO THE DISABLED

- + How to love your Buddhist neighbours
- & Married at First Sight



COVER

WROK on: disabled teens at a Youthworks camp. How do we as a church love the disabled among us? P11
 PHOTO: Stephen Webb

Sydney News	3
Mission News	4
Australian News	5
World News	6
Letters	7
Essay of the Month	8
Changes	9
Archbishop writes	10
Cover Feature	11
Moore is More	12
Events	13
Culture	14

“ ..That was what convinced me the hymns needed to be reshared. ”

Steph Vanden Hengel
 Culture



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Rainbow's end at Oran Park

Somewhere, under the rainbow: the new church opens. PHOTO: Stuart Starr

AFTER YEARS OF PLANNING AND PREPARATION, SYDNEY'S NEWEST CHURCH BUILDING HAS BEEN opened in the housing area of Oran Park, southwest of Sydney.

It was in 1989 that Archbishop Donald Robinson first identified Oran Park as an area that would require a church in the future. The new building now sits on Marcus Loane Way, a street named for his predecessor. The suburb has been a test case for the diocesan response in so-called "greenfields" areas, with planning underway since 2002 and land purchased in 2009. Oran Park Anglican School and Cheshalon Living, Anglicare's new seniors complex, were constructed first as the housing development took shape.

After spending years meeting in people's homes and then at a school the church's new home, designed to house 220 children and adults, was opened by Archbishop Glenn Davies on May 2.

Council approval has already been granted for the seating to be doubled in Stage 2 of the building. "The clever architecture of the building, with the ability to expand gracefully, helps us make full use of a marvellous site," the Archbishop said. "The good will of so many people – the Perich family who sold us the land, the regional council, the Mission Property Committee and of course [the Sydney Anglican] Schools Corporation and Anglicare in that triangle of Christian witness in Oran Park – was a wonderful experience.

"God's rich hand of blessing is clearly upon it and we can only trust God will continue to bless and expand new life in Oran Park through this church."

The most striking visual aspect of the modern design is a 20-metre high coloured glass tower, which can be seen across the suburb. According to architects NBR5+PARTNERS, the structure is a present-day version of a bell tower.

Oran Park's rector, the Rev Stuart Starr, said the contemporary look of the building and the multicolours of the new landmark represent the church's place within the suburb.

"For me, especially when the tower is lit from within at night, I'm reminded that Jesus said the church is to be a light on the hill and we look forward to helping people find hope, community and a fresh start with God," he said.

"We are the beneficiaries of much grace and we are truly grateful for the vision, planning and finances of the network of Anglican churches that is the Sydney Diocese. I'm thankful too for Matthew Payne, my associate, and our wives – we've come a long way since we were four adults and four kids in a living room in Oran Park!"

Oran Park is officially Sydney's fastest growing town, with an expected population increase of 2500 people every year for the next seven years.

Book ban reversed

A BAN ON TWO ANGLICAN RESOURCES USED IN SPECIAL Religious Education (SRE) has been reversed after talks between Archbishop Glenn Davies and the NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli.

The move follows a directive issued to public school principals on May 6 regarding *You: An Introduction* by the Rev Dr Michael Jensen and the *Sneaking Suspicion* resource by the Rev Dr John Dickson, both published by Christian Education Publications (CEP).

The department's directive said the books "may be in conflict with departmental policy and legislative requirements" and said "principals are required to direct SRE providers to cease using them immediately".

No further information about the concerns was given in the directive.

Another publication, *Teen Sex by the Book*, was mentioned in the directive after a campaign by a Victorian Facebook group which claimed it was used in SRE.

The minister and the department now acknowledge the book is not and never has been part of the SRE curriculum.

After ministerial intervention and the meeting with Archbishop Davies on Friday, May 15, Mr Piccoli wrote to Dr Davies saying, "I wish to confirm that there is no ban in place on these books and I have requested the DEC to inform the Directors Public Schools accordingly".

The minister conceded there had been no prior consultation with the Anglican Church before the directive was issued and that such consultation would be sought in future.

"As we discussed, the original memorandum was issued by the DEC on advice that there was a potential risk to students in the delivery of this material, if not taught sensitively and in an age-appropriate manner," Mr Piccoli wrote. "I was pleased to hear of your assurance that sensitive, age-appropriate delivery of SRE is an integral part of the training of SRE teachers in the Diocese of Sydney."

"On that basis I am pleased that agreement has been reached that the Anglican Church will continue to work closely with DEC to relieve any concerns associated with the delivery of SRE, given the supreme importance both the NSW Government and the Anglican Church place on protecting the welfare of children."

The letter to Dr Davies gave the minister's assurance that "The NSW Government is supportive of and committed to SRE, as is the Anglican Church, and I look forward to continuing to work closely with you on delivering best practice SRE."



Ban lifted: the publications originally banned by the department.

Cross-cultural ordinations

TWO NEW ORDINANDS ARE PREPARING TO CONTINUE THEIR CROSS-CULTURAL WORK IN LOCAL settings, while also taking time to enjoy being ordained in the presence of their local congregations.

Kevin Chan, who serves at Arncliffe Anglican Church in Sydney's south, says he is glad to be ordained in his parish after transitioning to a staff role following service as a student minister.

"I've only really started as an assistant here this year," he says. "I graduated from Moore last year and for a number of reasons I wasn't able to make the ordination in February. But this is the parish where I was a student minister. I've transitioned into a new role, and have a different focus in terms of ministry, but it's good to have built those connections over time."

Mr Chan says that, while he hadn't initially planned to stay on at the parish at the beginning of his student ministry, the vision the church had to connect with a growing and increasingly multi-ethnic population, and the invitation from the parish for him to stay on, meant things fell into place in what he describes as "God's providence".

"It's a great privilege to be ordained in this parish because it's with people I've worked with over the last couple of years," he says. "So, the promises I will be making at my ordination will be more real in that sense, and the people I've gotten to know and serve with will be the ones hearing me make those promises."



John Lee leading a musicians' outreach.

John Lee is another new ordinand, who works in the parish of Beverly Hills, also in southern Sydney. Mr Lee has spent several years as a diocesan lay worker, but was invited to be ordained this year.

"I'm glad to be ordained now," he says. "I wasn't chasing it, but I'm very appreciative of the opportunity. I think we're making a bit of a celebration out of the day. I have non-Christian friends coming along as well. It's not easy for everyone, often older folk, to make it to the Cathedral for ordinations, so it's great to have the opportunity to be ordained here as someone of this parish and to celebrate with the church family I spend so much time with."

Mr Lee was involved with a cross-cultural church plant in the parish of Rockdale in 2008 and served there for a number of years before making the jump to Beverly Hills in 2011. He is engaged in similar work in his current parish, focused on cross-cultural outreach.

"Chiefly, what [Beverly Hills senior minister] Paul James wants me to do is encourage evangelism, do evangelism myself and be looking outwards in that way," Mr Lee says. "So, practically, that means I am involved in ESL outreach, being involved in the playgroup and working in those kinds of ministries."

Both men were ordained late last month.

Raffel chosen as Dean

THE REV KANISHKA RAFFEL HAS BEEN APPOINTED THE NEW DEAN OF SYDNEY, THE FIRST PERSON from a non-European background to hold the position.

"I'm delighted Kanishka has accepted my appointment, which was unanimously agreed to by the Chapter," said Archbishop Glenn Davies in announcing the move.

Mr Raffel (right) has been the senior minister at St Matthew's, Shenton Park in Perth since 1999.

Born to Sri Lankan parents in London, Mr Raffel and his family emigrated to Australia from Canada. He was raised a Buddhist and converted to Christianity in his twenties.

"Kanishka has exercised a valuable ministry in Perth and although it is a big wrench for him and his family to return to Sydney, I appreciate the sacrifices that are involved," Dr Davies said.

The Archbishop described the new Dean as "an outstanding teacher of the Bible who, God willing, will have a significant ministry to the city of Sydney. Kanishka preaches with a pastor's heart and his care and concern for people will be evident throughout his ministry."

Responding to the appointment, Mr Raffel said he was "very excited about the opportunities for proclaiming the majesty and mercy of Jesus in the heart of the city of Sydney."

"I was a student minister at the Cathedral when I was at Moore College. It's an immense privilege to be returning there to serve the Lord."

The Anglican Cathedral, standing beside the Sydney Town Hall, has seen significant changes in city population, especially in the last quarter of a century. It now has a large proportion of congregants from an Asian or Subcontinental background.

The population of the City of Sydney has almost doubled in the past two decades, with 56 per cent of the population having both parents born overseas, compared with a state average of 36 per cent.

"The bustle and glamour of a big city only thinly veils human hearts full of longing," the new Dean said. The Cathedral is well placed to address those longings with the deep satisfaction of knowing Christ."



Lin for biggest NESB region

THE REV PETER LIN WAS CONSECRATED AS BISHOP OF THE GEORGES RIVER REGION BY ARCHBISHOP Glenn Davies at St Andrew's Cathedral on May 30.

Bishop Lin (right) is one of the youngest bishops in the history of the Diocese, and only the second of Chinese descent in Australia.

Georges River is one of the five diocesan regions and has undergone transformation into one of Sydney's most multicultural areas. Suburbs such as Marrickville, Lakemba and Bankstown, once with predominantly Anglo-Saxon populations, are now multiethnic.

"Peter has a heart for bringing the gospel to people of all nations and all levels of society," Dr Davies said. "He is an able expositor of the word of God, a fine pastor of God's people and a good administrator."

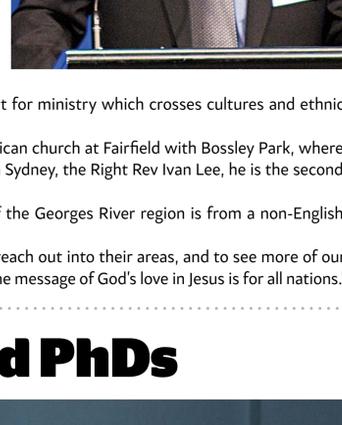
"I welcome him to the episcopal team and believe he will make a significant contribution to the work of the gospel in the Diocese of Sydney."

"Peter is Australian-born Chinese and, while he fully understands the Australian culture, his grandparents were migrants so he is also very much aware of the needs of people coming to this country. He has a heart for ministry which crosses cultures and ethnic divides with the unifying gospel of peace."

Bishop Lin, who is 47, was formerly rector of the Anglican church at Fairfield with Bossley Park, where he had worked since 1999. Before the Bishop of Western Sydney, the Right Rev Ivan Lee, he is the second bishop of Chinese descent.

Bishop Lin said that "more than half of population of the Georges River region is from a non-English speaking background."

"I'm keen to help Anglican churches better serve and reach out into their areas, and to see more of our church communities reflect the people around them. The message of God's love in Jesus is for all nations."



Moore to award PhDs



Doctor to doctor: Archbishop Davies congratulates Moore's most recent supervised PhD graduate Chase Kuhn.

SYDNEY'S MOORE COLLEGE WILL BECOME THE FIRST ANGLICAN COLLEGE IN AUSTRALIA TO award its own PhD.

In a significant move, Moore is one of very few non-university institutions in the country approved by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) as a self-accrediting authority for doctoral degrees in the field of philosophy and religious studies.

The college has been supervising PhDs for many years in conjunction with the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney. Now that a Moore college PhD is available, the college has the same range of awards as any public or private university – from diploma through to PhD.

In announcing the move, Moore's vice principal and academic dean, the Rev Dr Colin Bale, thanked registrar Rhonda Barry. "The Chief Commissioner noted the high level of co-operation that the commission had received from the college during the application process," Dr Bale said. "This decision makes the college in very good stead as we prepare for reregistration in 2016."

Under its new program Moore will offer a one-off postgraduate award that will cover all fees and provide a small living allowance each year for three years. College principal, the Rev Dr Mark Thompson, said, "This will enable us to extend our service of the churches both at home and around the world by providing the best theological preparation possible for their future leaders".

Flawless tour concludes



ANGLICAN AID'S TOUR OF DIOCESAN CHURCHES TO SUPPORT OVERSEAS TRAINING HAS COME to a close, with almost the whole Bible read at 260 churches in a month.

The director of Anglican Aid, the Rev David Mansfield, says the tour's aim was to show people the heart of the organisation's mission and encourage them to support aid work overseas.

"I chose reading the Bible with people because it's something that's at the heart of the Diocese, and we wanted to show that it's at the heart of Anglican Aid," he says. "It shapes the delivery of aid [and] the need to deliver aid, so we wanted to get that across, particularly when thinking about supporting training and development overseas."

"It was also the opportunity to meet people. They were brief meetings, and in a sense all I've done is skate across the top of the Diocese, but it was a chance to connect in that way."

The tour was promoting the Chappo and Hope Partnership, a fund for bursaries to theological students across Africa. Named after John Chapman and Hope, a South African evangelist who died saving a friend from drowning, the purpose of the fund reflects the character of the men whose names it bears – encouragement in gospel understanding and education with a view to evangelism, often at the grassroots level.

"The specific bursary is trying to raise money to train a generation of Bible teachers and that's what Chappo's life represented," Mr Mansfield says. "He didn't set out to be the biggest evangelist in the country, he just had a heart for people to know the Bible better and it grew from there. Hope was a young man committed to taking the gospel to his city and we want to support others like him in Africa."

The impact of this kind of ministry was reflected in encounters Mr Mansfield had on the tour, including one interaction while at Oatley.

"A senior saint, Doreen, shared with us that she lived in the same street as John Chapman from the 1930s," wrote Mr Mansfield while on tour. "When he was a Teachers' College student... she recalls him walking home each evening from Oatley Railway Station past her house to his. He would be singing, in full voice, some Gilbert and Sullivan or a range of hymns. Doreen remembers that as she heard the words of those great old hymns about God's glory, Jesus' death and resurrection and the call to trust and obey, she was awakened to her need to be right with God."

North Sydney gets fit



Fit for life: members of St Thomas' Cottagefit group.

ST THOMAS', NORTH SYDNEY IS RUNNING A FITNESS GROUP AIMED AT ENCOURAGING PEOPLE to keep fit as well as creating connections with non-churchgoing locals.

The idea for the program, called "Cottagefit", grew out of a similar program run at Sovereign Grace Church Sydney, and is focused simply on creating a space for Christians and non-Christians to work on fitness together, and build connections in a community environment.

"It's really just general fitness, with the intention of inviting friends who don't go to church," says group co-ordinator Palmer Wang. "Everyone does the same thing, we make it so your level of fitness before going in isn't a much of an issue, and it isn't a class so much as a group of people with some leading.

"We saw this working elsewhere, we worked to get it [right for] church premises, and it's been going for a good year and a half now."

The group is run three times a week in the church's cottage hall. Mr Wang says anywhere from 10 to 40 people attend any given session.

"We usually have about 20 per cent or so of that being people who aren't involved in church at all," Mr Wang says. "It's really a stepping stone ministry, not a word ministry as such, but we do aim to make it an environment where people can become familiar with the faces of St Thomas', so we're not so foreign to others. The hope is then from there to invite new friends to things like Christianity Explained.

"It's also ended up being a place where people can just be involved in community, as a complement to the Christian community of church."

Mr Wang says a key aspect of doing this kind of ministry is to make it a group-run thing, with multiple people involved in organisation, with some basic training or self-education in training and fitness safety.

He says it's also important to be aware of the wide range of fitness levels among those who attend, as well as motivations people may have for joining such a group.

"I think most people who come to the group do so because they want to do fitness in a group, as opposed to trying to do that stuff on their own," he says.

"It's mostly local people [who] come to us, and the age range is pretty large – we go up to about 50 or so right down to 18. It's also a wide range of fitness levels, but I suppose in a way that range and accessibility is what makes the group attractive for people."



When doves fly

The Anglican Church at Noosa chose a spectacular way to celebrate its new congregation at Peregian Beach on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland. Concentration was high as children held doves ready for a simultaneous release after the Pentecost service at the local Anglican school, St Andrew's College. The church, headed by former Sydney minister, the Rev Mark Calder, also has sites at Tewantin and Sunshine Beach. PHOTO:Kepler Schumann

Nepal struck by two earthquakes



A woman sits outside the remains of her house, on a remote mountain hillside in rural Nepal. Too scared to go near her ruined home, she is now living in a chicken shed. PHOTO: DFID

TWO EARTHQUAKES HAVE STRUCK NEPAL, KILLING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE AND DISPLACING many more.

The current death toll stands at more than 8500 people, with another 3 million displaced. International development agencies, including Christian ones, are heavily involved with relief work and committed to long-term reconstruction.

Kirstin Hawkshaw, a CMS missionary seconded to the International Nepal Fellowship (INF), works primarily in the Pokhara region that was relatively unaffected by the quakes. However, it has increasingly become a haven for people from outlying villages, and the devastated capital of Kathmandu, who are either displaced or will not stay in their homes for fear of more aftershocks.

"INF has been doing a fair bit of relief work and the Pokhara Christian community has been able to do even more," Ms Hawkshaw says. "They have been working very hard to get relief packs out from very early on. INF is also planning for long-term work and rehabilitation in the affected communities."

Ms Hawkshaw says the new spinal cord unit at INF's Green Pastures Hospital is hosting 11 patients with injuries caused by the quakes, with more expected. Because of the emergence of cracks in some of the hospital's older buildings, several fearful patients are choosing to sleep on the new ward's verandah.

With the monsoon season around the corner, immediate concerns are to provide shelter and dry, hygienic conditions for Nepalis, particularly people who live in remote villages that, since the earthquakes, are only accessible by helicopter. The terrain has proved difficult for military helicopters, with private helicopters taking on many of the relief drops plus ferrying patients in need of immediate medical care. A US Huey helicopter crashed in Nepal's mountains on a rescue mission in mid-May, killing six US Marines and two Nepali soldiers.

At the time of the first quake Ms Hawkshaw was running a camp for families of children with cerebral palsy. While some family members at home received mild injuries, and several attendees suffered property damage while away, because of damaged roads all the families chose to remain at the camp's undamaged centre for the rest of the program.

"It was seen as a good time of enabling them to be closer and to support each other through this shared experience," Ms Hawkshaw says. "While at times both staff and the parents' attention went to news reports and other things, it was great to be part of making this a safe and supportive environment, and to see how they became much more relaxed and able to keep focusing on their children. The earthquake is having a huge impact on all of Nepal but even in the midst of this, these children and families are important."

Anglican Aid has launched an emergency Nepal appeal. Funds will be used for relief and development only for those affected by the quakes. See anglicanaid.org.au

New Port Moresby bishop in PNG



The Rev Denny Guka (left) with Sydney's the Rev Kevin Kim at GAFCON in Kenya.

THE REV DENNY GUKA HAS BEEN consecrated as bishop of Port Moresby in the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea.

Bishop Guka was elected in March by the House of Bishops to replace Bishop Peter Ramsden, who retired last September.

He had been serving as the chaplain at the University of PNG and also as Vicar General of the Port Moresby Diocese. Originally from a village in the northern province of PNG, he was also previously rector of East Boroko.

As well as his other duties, Bishop Guka is the chairman of the PNG Council of Churches and campaigned against the siting of the Australian Government's detention centre on Manus Island. He has also asked for churches to have access to detainees.

Bishop Peter Tasker was the official representative of the Sydney Diocese at the consecration. Bishop Guka's consecration means that for the first time, all six members of the House of Bishops in Papua New Guinea's Anglican Church will be PNG nationals.

GRATITUDE FOR LAMB

As I read the Rev Tony Lamb's obituary (SC, May), I reflected on the debt of gratitude I owed him.

When I met Tony I had become very atheistic and had stopped going to church, having come under the influence of "liberal" and "progressive" clergy about 60 years ago.

The seed of my atheism started with a liberal minister who took my Scripture class as a teenager. My atheism increased with liberal and progressive ministers when I was in my 20s.

Then a friend invited me to Tony Lamb's church in Caringbah. Tony knew, loved and believed the Bible and he taught me that I could trust, believe and love the Bible, too.

Was Tony perfect? Of course he wasn't. Like all clergy, he was not without his share of critics. Did criticism help further the kingdom? I doubt it.

Some clergy become "progressive" Christians in order to embrace secular thinking. Social justice replaces the salvation, which leads to eternal life. They mean well.

Those of us who are blessed with Bible-believing ministers need to uphold them in prayer. Let us not pray a "Make him do it my way" kind of prayer, but positive prayer to strengthen them for spiritual warfare.

Ministers, like all church members, are far from perfect and they don't have every gift. They are only part of the body of Christ. However, they all have a gift that needs to be encouraged.

I was invited to three Bible study groups when I went to Women's Fellowship at Caringbah. These were nurturing, caring groups that exemplified the body of Christ.

Along with many others, I thank God for Tony Lamb's teaching ministry and encouragement of active congregational participation.

Rewa Bate
Tea Gardens

LUWUM MEMORIES

Colin Reed's story about the death of Archbishop Janani Luwum (SC, April) brought tears to my eyes as memories of that time flooded back. We were living in the north-west corner of Tanzania at the time and the horrors of what was happening in Uganda filtered through to us.

Our son was at school at St Andrew's, Turi where Colin and his wife Wendy were teaching. One of our missionaries (Crosslinks UK) in Uganda was imprisoned in Kampala and was amazed and humbled when the door of her cell opened and the guards admitted the Archbishop who was able to comfort her with his presence, and remind her of God's comfort and presence.

None of us knew what would happen next but all of us were reminded that the Lord is in control of leaders and governments, however much the situation might appear different, and that God did not promise us a life free from suffering but we were not to fear one who kills the body – only he who can kill the soul. We held on to his promise that he would keep us to the end of our lives and into eternity.

Praise God for the witness and life of Archbishop Janani Luwum.

Jan Adeney
Macmasters Beach



Correction: In "Bowral's double celebration" (SC, April) it was stated that more than \$500,000 was donated for the construction of St Jude's Christian education centre. In fact, more than \$1.5 million was raised and local generosity should be acknowledged.

Being a Sydney missionary to your Buddhist neighbours



JOSH LING

THE ONLY QUALIFICATION YOU NEED TO INTRODUCE JESUS TO YOUR BUDDHIST NEIGHBOUR IS your suffering as a Christian and your discovery of a Saviour. Suffering is universal, according to Buddhist belief. Life itself has challenges.

I write this in case you feel that you need to be trained with special Buddhist Apologetics before you walk over to your neighbour's house and invite them over for a cuppa. Some basic understanding of Buddhism will help but you do not need to be an expert. An understanding of what makes the Christian faith *distinct* from all other religions is non-negotiable, but sharing your faith with Buddhist friends is going to take time, often longer than a cup of tea or coffee.

As a convert to Christianity, raised in a traditional Buddhist and Chinese family, I am surprised and a little amused with the growing popularity of Buddhism in Australia. Many Asians are Buddhists because of family tradition and, in some countries, because it is the national religion. Driven by a strong sense of duty or loyalty and fear that any deviation might bring shame to the collective, conversion to Christianity among Asians requires an intentional parting of ways. It was common, as recently as 30 years ago in Singapore, to hear news of Chinese converts being persecuted or disowned by their family because of Jesus.

When I became a Christian it brought much conflict to my family. Misunderstandings about this so-called Western religion were common. Partaking of the Lord's Supper was seen as initiation into this cult. This was the norm many years ago. But in many parts of Asia today this is no longer the case, thanks to the rapid changes brought on by industrialisation, globalisation and secularism.

THE GOOD NEWS

The good news (not the gospel) is that you now share more in common with your overseas Buddhist neighbour than you realise, including the challenge of keeping your sanity and humanity in a world driven by economics and excessive consumption. In other words, they are struggling with many of the same anxieties we have.

In this sense, we are all suffering. We suffer to balance work and family. We worry about our health and our children's future and wellbeing. We are concerned about the economy. The fact that we, now speaking as a first-generation migrant myself, have the financial ability to live in your neighbourhood says something about us. We might just be as aspirational as you, if not more, having missed out on the economic goods for many years.

In many parts of Asia there is a moral vacuum left behind as traditional values and beliefs are either abandoned or stripped away by capitalism, politics and civil war. Self interest and material goods fill the void. We are used to hard work and, when that brings prosperity, we work harder and desire more.

Chinese converts today commonly say that their parents have no objection to their faith, having none themselves. The pressure for Christian students returning to their home countries comes not from religious objections but secular and economic ones. The picture may vary in different Buddhist nations, but the long-term trend across Asia suggests increasing secularisation.

THE BAD NEWS

The bad news is, for a variety of historical, cultural and political reasons, that there is deep-seated distrust within our psyche. We are sincere in our acceptance of your friendship and hospitality. We are happy to sit in your churches, enjoy your community and learn your language.

Deep inside we hunger for genuine human kindness and love but we have learnt from bitter experience that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Some of us come from a past where not only were we exploited by outsiders, we were also betrayed and hurt by our own leaders. Trust is at a premium and it has to be earned. That is why it is going to take time for me to trust you, especially when there are language barriers in the mix. For the moment, I trust what I can accumulate.

We (still in my migrant voice) are also used to many religions and ideologies jostling for our loyalty. Postmodernity suits us well. We never knew anything else. And so, we are used to being handed a pamphlet or brochure. Our polite acceptance is to be expected but it takes more to touch us on the inside.

We are naturally suspicious of friendship motivated by doctrines. It is going to take time before I realise that it is the *doctrine of God's love that moves you towards genuine and self-sacrificial friendship* – first from within God himself and then flowing out from him, through you, to me. It is a journey that requires suffering, God's and ours.

For the moment, all I see is your lifestyle and maybe your anxiety to fill your church. I wonder if Christianity is your lifestyle choice, just like others have embraced Buddhism as their preferred lifestyle.

THE CONVERSION JOURNEY

My conversion to Christianity was not spectacular. It was a long journey marked with encounters with a few Christians who not only taught me the Bible but, more importantly, lived and walked the Bible with me for a long time. They were "missionaries" to me even though they would not have thought of themselves as such. They were genuinely interested in me and through opening their lives showed that following Jesus has nothing to do with moral improvements, nor would a Christian faith exempt me from suffering or sickness.

They were ordinary people who struggled like me, except for one important difference: they had a Saviour who redeemed them from their mistakes and saved them, day by day. That is the good news. There is no such saviour in Buddhism – only my own efforts.

It will take ordinary people to take this good news to the Buddhist world. People who are not in a real hurry to see results. People who are not defined or saved by results. You don't need to be an expert in Buddhism. But you must be a practising Christian. It is not a lifestyle choice but a call to live sacrificially, following a living Saviour. If that is you, you are ready to be a missionary. Go.

Josh Ling is the Partnership Support Facilitator for CMS NSW & ACT.

The CMS appeal for 2015 is focusing on the needs of Buddhist Asia. See cms.org.au/nswact

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

MOVES



SOUTHWEST TO LEICHHARDT

The Rev David O'Mara will become rector of Leichhardt at the beginning of August, after nine years in the southwestern Sydney parish of Sadleir.

He says he has enjoyed the team atmosphere in Sadleir, not only among the staff but also seeing "how God brought us together as a church... that's been a great encouragement".

Mr O'Mara admits tears were shed when he announced his departure, but he also feels it is the right time to make the move. "There's momentum in the church, which is important, but there are also challenges and I think it will be good to have someone with fresh eyes bring something new to it."

He is looking forward to the opportunities that Leichhardt presents. The parish has recently undertaken a review with Dr Paul Borden of Growing Healthy Churches and, he says, is looking for new ways to engage with the local community.

"They're wanting someone who's going to love them and pastor them and look at ways of connecting to the community and that's really what we've done here at Sadleir," he says. "We've built bridges to the community and looked at ways of utilising those for the gospel. [At Leichhardt] we're going to see who we are as God's people, seek the Lord and pray, and see where he take us."

Mr O'Mara hopes others will pray surrounding this move, because "there are people we need to reach. We covet people's prayer, not just from Sadleir and Leichhardt but across the wider church. We'd be very appreciative of that."

RIVERINA TO HUNTERS HILL

The Rev Michael Armstrong was inducted as the new rector of Hunters Hill on May 28.

Mr Armstrong and his family have moved to Sydney from the Riverina city of Wagga Wagga, where he was rector of the four-church Anglican parish for five years.

He says he had realised his ministry at Wagga Wagga was in a transitional stage and was seeking the right way forward.

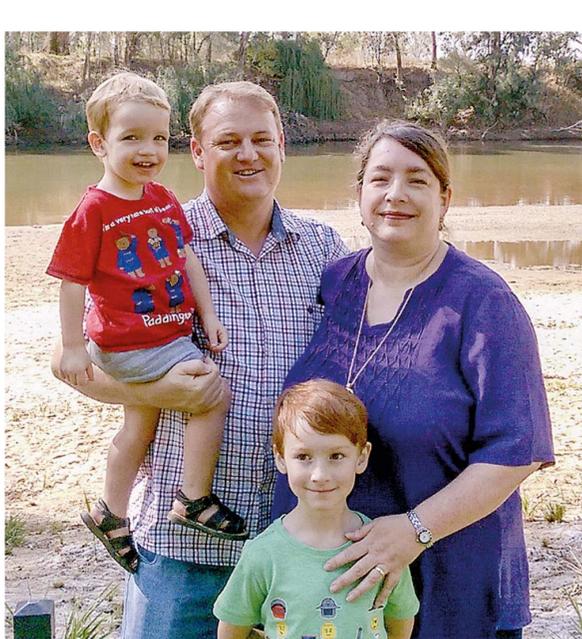
When the nominators from Hunters Hill unexpectedly made contact, "we started to explore and discern and the more we did that, the more [a move] started to feel right.

"It's a huge change, and it's been a hard parting because we've formed close relationships within the church and in the community – especially as our younger son was born here," he says.

Mr Armstrong says he shares the desire of those within the Hunters Hill parish to reach out to the community in new ways, particularly to families.

"They're a more traditional parish, and they're wanting to consider how do you be a traditional church with a contemporary feel and also reach out in different ways to what some of the neighbouring churches are doing," he says. "The parish is really interested in social justice and taking that forward – they already do some work with refugees and asylum seekers.

"They want to engage with all the different aspects of Anglicanism and they want to make sure that they're not an isolated community, but engage with all parts of the Anglican Church and take the best of each, which is something that really attracted me. I'll be spending a lot of time listening to the people there, and also in Hunters Hill generally, to find out what the needs in the community are."



CHAPLAINCY CALL



The rector of St Michael's, Surry Hills for the past 14 years, the Rev Francis Chalwell, will leave the parish next month to become the lead chaplain in aged care for Anglicare Sydney.

The role includes leading a team of chaplains, one-to-one chaplaincy work as well as raising up and equipping the volunteer team and working on connections with parishes and the wider community.

"I aim to enhance the Christian ministry that's already happening in aged care," Mr Chalwell says. "I am very excited about the job because it's got lots of opportunities for meeting people face to face."

What started him thinking about a move was attending the funeral late last year of a member of a church he previously pastored. A number of people at the funeral thanked him for his home visits to them in his former role "and I was intrigued that this was what they remembered me for. As I travelled home my heart said, 'I miss that'.

Inner city ministry has presented me with diverse opportunities and challenges but visiting is not a major one, relatively speaking... that was when I knew it was time to make a change."

Mr Chalwell is sad to leave but "proud of the way the team here has built a culture of gospel-shaped love for all in Surry Hills... I have also been excited over the way God continually brings diverse people together here."

After feeling called to come to the parish he knew he should also have a strong calling to leave. "When I saw the chaplaincy job I thought that was a new direction that would use all the skills and experience I have gained, and opportunities to connect the community with older people."

This feeling of calling was underscored by immediate agreement from his wife Kaye that the job sounded just right for him, and St Michael's members, while sad to see him go, have agreed – "which has been very heartening".

CORNISH MOVE



After 18 years as rector of Epping, and a busy 34-year ordained ministry that has taken him from Canberra to Sydney and central Queensland, the Rev John Cornish will retire on July 7.

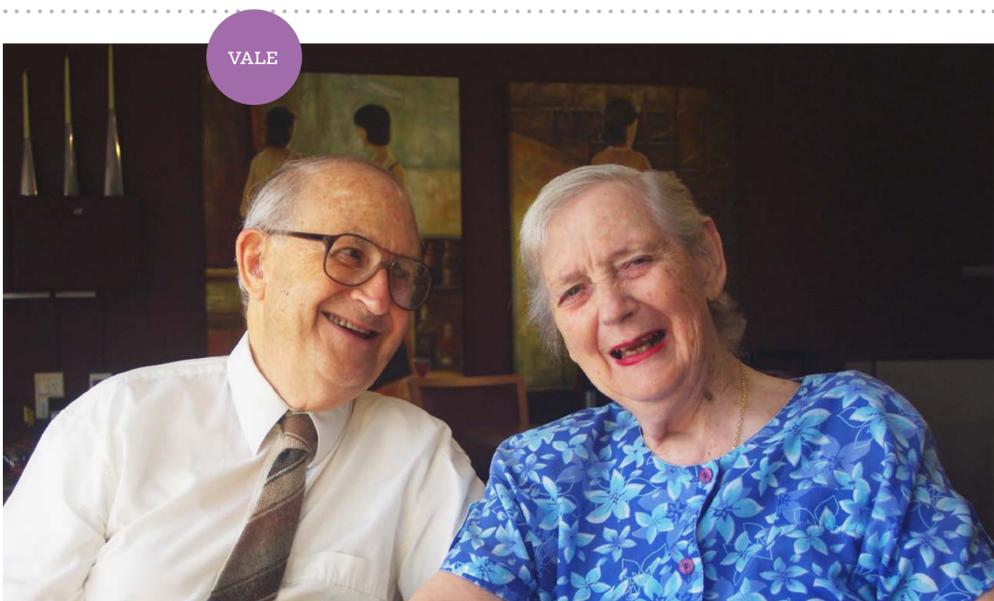
"It's been great time," he says. "I've always found St Alban's and St Aidan's to be a very warm, friendly and encouraging group of people. They're willing try new things without losing tradition. Four of my five grandchildren were baptised here and my three children were married here.

"Ecumenical things have also been very important with our covenant with Epping Baptist, Carlingford Baptist, two Uniting churches – West Epping and Epping – and the Catholic parish of Epping and Carlingford. We all draw together and struggle to live up to the ideals of Jesus and being the body of Christ, and it's been really rewarding to see other people and how they worship, draw upon their ways and hopefully show them ours as well."

Mr Cornish regards the Church as a gathering of all people, and hopes the diversity and inclusiveness of his parish – "to be different yet traditional" – will continue.

He and his wife Christine plan to move into their house on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, have a holiday and then see what life brings them.

VALE



Mrs Rosemary Cameron died on May 1 aged 87. Born on Christmas Day 1927, Rosemary – or Rose to her friends – attended SCEGGS and studied psychology at the University of Sydney before travelling abroad.

She and Donald Cameron married in 1952 and, when he began Moore College study in 1956, Rose accepted yet to embrace faith for herself. However, after studying and reflecting on the Scriptures she had Jesus and, in the words of family friend Louise Kaye, "although she came to Christian faith slowly... she maintained that faith to the end".

In her eulogy on behalf of the family Mrs Kaye described Rosemary Cameron as an "anchor and compass for the family" during Bishop Cameron's many ministry moves and trips away for organisations such as CMS. She also described Mrs Cameron's "seemingly limitless" capacity to include, love and care for all who needed it – including guests on the doorstep without notice.

"Her children would ask, 'How many people are we setting the table for tonight?'... In the years following my mother's death in 1974, which left me without family, Rose and Don were supremely generous to me with their hospitality and time, including me in family activities and providing support, encouragement and love."

Mrs Cameron also spent decades teaching Scripture and was very involved in the work of Mothers' Union and Prayer on Wheels.

"Her last years were clouded with frailty and forgetfulness but the love which she both gave and received was undiminished," Mrs Kaye said. "Her selflessness was always at the fore."

In his sermon, Pymble rector the Rev Roger Chilton said, "I never saw a moment when Rose doubted the promise of the resurrection to eternal life nor a fear of death and what lies beyond."

Book bans and SRE



DR GLENN DAVIES

LAST MONTH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNITIES (DEC) TOOK the unprecedented step of prohibiting the use of two books and their associated student handbooks, which are part of the authorised curriculum for Anglican Special Religious Education (SRE) in high schools across the Diocese of Sydney. The two books, *A Sneaking Suspicion* by the Rev Dr John Dickson and *You: An Introduction* by the Rev Dr Michael Jensen, have been part of the SRE high school curriculum for many years.

The move was not only unprecedented but also unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, there was no consultation with the Anglican Church and no reason given for the prohibition at the time the directive was issued, despite the fact that the DEC had been considering the appropriateness of these two texts since last December. Second, the curriculum for Anglican SRE in our Diocese is authorised by me in my capacity as Archbishop of Sydney, not by the DEC. The role of the DEC is to approve the providers of SRE, such as the Anglican Church, and then to allow the provider to authorise their particular curriculum.

To compound these problems, in the week of the prohibition, all school principals were required to obtain a signed declaration from every SRE teacher that they would not use either of these texts in their classes. These declarations were required of kindergarten SRE teachers as well as those teaching high school Scripture! Despite the heavy hand of the department, I am pleased to say that I know of no SRE teacher who failed to comply with this instruction, which was, of course, the right and proper response.

The situation was made all the more complex by the DEC also banning a book which is not even a part of the SRE curriculum, namely, Dr Patricia Weerakoon's *Teen Sex by the Book*. While this is an excellent resource for church youth groups and some of our Anglican schools, it has never been authorised for use in Government schools, and therefore should not be used in SRE.

I met with the Minister for Education, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli, and we had an amicable and fruitful conversation. Upon affording me a fair hearing, Mr Piccoli immediately offered an apology for the events of the previous week and assured me that if the DEC had concerns in the future, they would first consult with us, as the SRE provider. Upon discussing the reasons for the prohibition of the two texts, it emerged that the concerns of the DEC were with the delivery of the lessons rather than the content of the books. I agreed with the Minister that when discussing topics such as cancer and death, sensitivity is required. However, I was also able to assure the Minister that sensitive, age-appropriate delivery of SRE is an integral part of the training of SRE teachers in the Diocese of Sydney. Upon hearing of this assurance, he lifted the ban on the two books in question. His letter to me confirming our conversation may be found on <http://sydneyanglicans.net/news/book-ban-reversed>.

I am very grateful to the Minister for Education for his speedy response to the situation. I was also glad to hear of the ongoing commitment of the NSW Government to SRE. We have always had a close working relationship with the DEC over the years, and I have no reason to believe that the crisis of last month will be repeated.

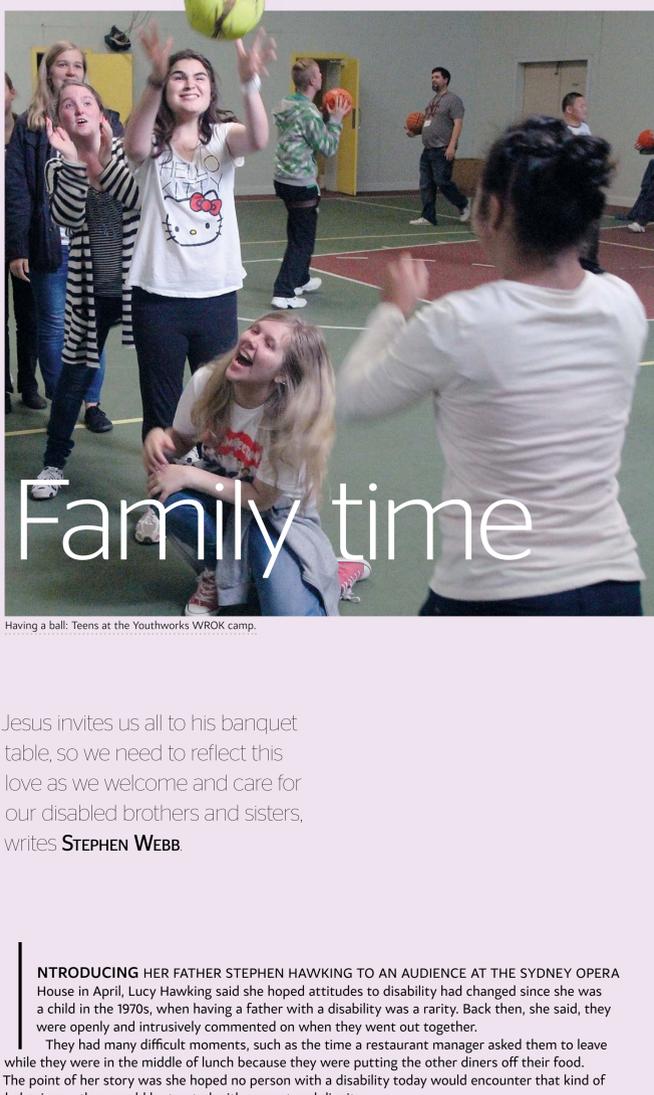
Despite the confusion and inaccuracies that were reported in the Fairfax and News Limited newspapers about this incident, the outcome has been a strengthening of the place of SRE in Government schools, for which we thank God. However, the permission that we have as Anglicans to enter our local schools to provide Special Religious Education should not be taken for granted. Moreover, our entrance into schools is not for the purpose of evangelism but for education. We honour this privilege by only using the authorised curriculum, which is publicly available for all parents whose children attend SRE, so that they can know what is being taught. All SRE teachers in the Diocese of Sydney should know that only the authorised curriculum can be used in SRE, which is published by Youthworks, namely the Connect suite of materials for infants and primary, and the collection of resources for high school listed on their website (<http://www.youthworks.net/sre/authorised-curriculum>).

Our commitment to providing quality SRE for students in Government schools is a high one, both in the provision of quality material and in its delivery by well qualified and trained teachers. I am grateful for the thousands of volunteer SRE teachers who labour so faithfully each week to bring the teaching of the Bible into Government school classrooms. They are our unsung champions of faith, and I thank God for them all.

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.



Having a ball: Teens at the Youthworks WROK camp.

Jesus invites us all to his banquet table, so we need to reflect this love as we welcome and care for our disabled brothers and sisters.

writes **STEPHEN WEBB**

INTRODUCING HER FATHER STEPHEN HAWKING TO AN AUDIENCE AT THE SYDNEY OPERA House in April, Lucy Hawking said she hoped attitudes to disability had changed since she was a child in the 1970s, when having a father with a disability was a rarity. Back then, she said, they were openly and intrusively commented on when they went out together.

They had many difficult moments, such as the time a restaurant manager asked them to leave while they were in the middle of lunch because they were putting the other diners off their food. The point of her story was she hoped no person with a disability today would encounter that kind of behaviour – they would be treated with respect and dignity.

Unfortunately, the Hawkings' 1970s dining experience can still be observed in 21st century society – and churches. While they may not be ushered out because they are putting people off their worship experience, people with disability (and the family or friends with them) are often ignored, avoided or excluded. Mostly this is due to fear and ignorance rather than self interest, but it represents missed opportunities to welcome and minister to a significant proportion of our population.

In its 2012 survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that 4.2 million Australians, or 18.5 per cent of the population, have a disability. While those people and their families are often affected by discrimination and a lack of understanding from others in society, Luke 14, a CBM Australia initiative to encourage and enable churches to welcome and include people with a disability, says churches have an opportunity to make a difference.

When you see what happens at Youthworks' WROK camp each year, it's clear how great that difference could be. At WROK all the campers are teens with disabilities but relationships are strong and the kids feel safe. The camp is full of friends, dancing, singing, computer games and sports, with leaders having almost as much fun as the campers.

One of the leaders, Chris Pullen (right), first took part in WROK last year when he was in Youthworks' Year 13 program.

"It's one of the most encouraging ministries that I have encountered," he says. "It gives the kids a chance to express themselves and enjoy themselves in a way that they might not be able to do in their normal lives. And also it's an opportunity for them to hear about the word of God."

"In so many ways these kids are just like other teenagers and we should be treating them as such. Laughing with them, playing with them, having a good time."

Husbands and wives, parents and children – people from all different backgrounds and cultures – are looking for churches where the challenges and blessings of disability are embraced as they are at WROK, and where they can bring and be their whole selves.

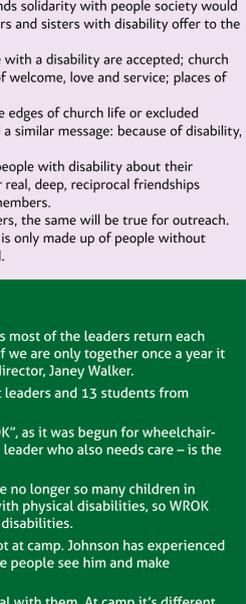
A discussion paper on disability and theology prepared by Anglicare's policy unit in 2010 says Christians have been called to acknowledge that their own brokenness demands solidarity with people society would label as "disabled". If they don't understand what their brothers and sisters with disability offer to the church, this is a mark of immaturity in the faith.

It is not sufficient for the church to be a place where people with a disability are accepted; church communities are called to be family to one another – places of welcome, love and service; places of friendship and expansive hospitality.

However, people with a disability still find themselves on the edges of church life or excluded altogether. Both visible and unintended invisible barriers send a similar message: because of disability, some people don't belong.

When British Christian charity Through the Roof surveyed people with disability about their experience of church, the greatest heart cry was a longing for real, deep, reciprocal friendships between Christians with disabilities and their fellow church members.

If access and friendship needs are not being met for members, the same will be true for outreach. When we live as though the community around our churches is only made up of people without disabilities, we effectively leave almost 20 per cent unreachable.



SOLID WROK

At the Youthworks WROK camp for teens with disabilities most of the leaders return each year because they, like the kids, enjoy it so much. "Even if we are only together once a year it is like having a family back together," says the camp co-director, Janey Walker.

This year's camp welcomed 27 kids (seven new), 23 adult leaders and 13 students from Youthworks' Year 13 program.

The original name for the camp was "Wheelchairs Rule OK", as it was begun for wheelchair-bound kids. Now Nathan Johnson, with cerebral palsy – a leader who also needs care – is the only one who "rules" from a wheelchair.

That's because there has been a shift in society. There are no longer so many children in institutions. Now society is more accessible for people with physical disabilities, so WROK has become more important for people with intellectual disabilities.

Things can be hard for some of the kids when they are not at camp. Johnson has experienced churches where he has been ignored and left out because people see him and make assumptions.

Some kids are stigmatised. People don't know how to deal with them. At camp it's different and the kids' behaviour is different. They don't have the same fight or flight mode. No one tries to escape.

In general society, if they can't keep up it is very easy for people to dismiss or ignore them. But at camp people know how to interact with them, how to give them the time of day and to get to what it is they are trying to say. They are allowed to be themselves at camp, without any judgment.

Researchers talk about kids needing to find their tribe: WROK is their tribe. There is no time pressure. No one is laughing at them. There is no fear of failure. Everyone gets it.

That's not always the case in a church environment. Churches are just like broader society and reflect its limitations.

Johnson has been coming for 16 years, since he was 12. He attends a Pentecostal church in Newcastle that is unusual because it has a lot of young people, is fun and people look after him. The key thing is inclusion, he says. He comes to WROK to encourage other campers and the leaders. He has built relationships with leaders and keeps in contact with them, largely through Facebook: "Without Facebook I don't know where I'd be".

Facebook is the social life for many of the campers. Monica was a senior camper this year and next year will come as a trainee leader. Whenever anything horrible happens in the world or she knows someone is sick she puts Bible verses and words of encouragement up on the WROK Facebook page.

Jess Errington first came to WROK with Campers 13 and is still there five years later because it is her favourite ministry. She says her church is in the process of implementing education about kids with disabilities.

"We want people to know that it's okay, they have special needs but they are just like you and me," she says. "They want to be loved and they want to have fun and they want to go crazy and eat crazy things and experience all there is to life."

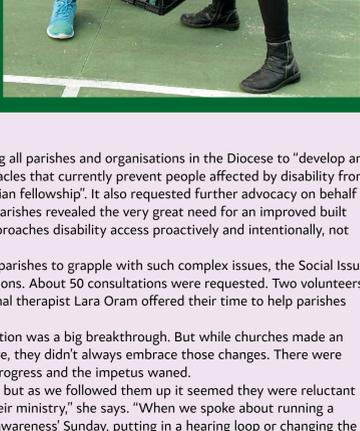
Janey Walker says parents send their kids to WROK for various reasons: for the kids to have a good time, to get a break for themselves, or for the kids to get a Christian education in addition to church.

"It's hard to get volunteers, especially with the experience, personality and heart," she says. "It's not a glamorous or cool ministry. In fact it can be gross. But the leaders who do attend come back every year."

"Being brave enough to step into it can change their lives. People get more out of it than they put into it."

And what can the church do for the kids when camp is over?

"Church needs to be a family and a fellowship. It can't be a closed club or somewhere you come briefly and go home. It needs to be able to change to do things differently."



Above left: Nathan Johnson. Above right: Jess Errington. Below: Campers try and outdo each other in the crate tower challenge.



WE NEED EACH OTHER

In 2009 Synod passed a resolution asking all parishes and organisations in the Diocese to "develop and implement a plan to remove those obstacles that currently prevent people affected by disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship". It also requested further advocacy on behalf of these people. A June 2010 survey of parishes revealed the very great need for an improved built environment and a new culture that approaches disability access proactively and intentionally, not reactively.

Recognising that it would be hard for parishes to grapple with such complex issues, the Social Issues Executive offered free on-site consultations. About 50 consultations were requested. Two volunteers, academic Louise Gosbell and occupational therapist Lara Oram offered their time to help parishes change.

According to Gosbell the Synod resolution was a big breakthrough. But while churches made an agreement to be more disability inclusive, they didn't always embrace those changes. There were meetings across the Diocese but little progress and the impetus waned.

"Quite a few churches were interested but as we followed them up it seemed they were reluctant to make changes in the way they ran their ministry," she says. "When we spoke about running a Bible study on disability or a 'disability awareness' Sunday, putting in a hearing loop or changing the way people entered a room, they were hesitant. The bigger steps toward making their church more welcoming were put in the too-hard basket."

Gosbell, who teaches Disability and Normality at Mary Andrews College, is writing a PhD thesis in which she uses disability as a lens through which to examine biblical texts. She also works as a volunteer for CBM Australia – with a focus on helping Christian communities become more inclusive for people living with a disability – and is the Sydney co-ordinator for Luke 14.

She started thinking about disability in the Christian context when one of her brothers-in-law, with Down syndrome, was stopped from handing out leaflets before services at a church on the north coast. The reason given was that someone with an intellectual disability didn't have the capacity to understand the gospel and therefore shouldn't be representing the church.

Gosbell realised that, and unless it is in a person's sphere of experience, they don't think about what life is like for people with disability – and, by extension, what church life is like. She says disability is not a marginal issue. With an ageing population, it is an issue that will inevitably affect every single person. Yet she still encounters the view that it is a marginal ministry, off to one side, rather than being something that is part of our everyday experience of worshipping together as a church.

"The classic line I've heard from ministers is, 'We don't need to put a ramp into our church because we don't have anyone with a disability.' And so I say, 'You will never have anyone with a disability in your church unless you put this in'."

"We are excluding people. Just looking at the outside of the building is enough to put people off. And then, once you get inside, there might be no accessible toilets or other issues. It can be difficult for people with disability to feel like they belong to a church community."

Gosbell believes churches should be making an effort to be more accommodating. "People shouldn't have to ask for the large-print bulletin because it's always there. Instead of squashing everything into PowerPoint in a 10-point font that no one can read anyway, just have it in a larger print. It's not a big deal. Often the changes you make will benefit everyone, not just someone who has low vision. Small changes can make a big difference."

It might be too expensive to put in a ramp, she says, but if people don't make an effort in relationships that is a huge problem.

"There are positive stories," she says, "but we hear stories all the time – really awful stories – of people being told to leave. I heard a story recently of a family who had a child with autism. One of their other children was being baptised at church and the minister asked them to leave the child with a disability at home. That was the family's time to come together and be part of the church community and show they were dedicating their children."

"Unfortunately that happens a lot. We are worried about the way we run our services. We like our structure. We like our silence. We have this idea of what church is supposed to be and people who have social difficulties just don't fit into our system. It works for most but it doesn't work for everyone."

Rather than a charity model, Gosbell says, people with disability should be seen as part of a beautiful, diverse, functioning body of Christ, where we all have different gifts and talents.

Reframing the image of God has important implications for the issue of disability, she says. "If we think the image of God is about dominion and cognisance then we start thinking people with disability are not quite the same image-of-God bearers as the rest of us. Whereas if we think about the image of God in a sense of being relational and saying God created us to be in a relationship with him, that transcends intellectual and physical capacity."

"God can interrelate with us irrespective of our physical ability or disability or intellectual capacity."

Gosbell thinks Anglicans should be more concerned about disability. "The church, of all places, should be the place where people with disability feel like they belong. If anyone should be doing this right it is us; if anyone knows what it is to be unworthy and unacceptable but to be changed to be acceptable because of Christ, that's us. We should be doing this."

MOBILISE FOR INCLUSION

LUKE14 (www.luke14.cbm.org.au) is an initiative of CBM, an international Christian development organisation committed to improving the quality of life of people with disability.

It recommends four steps to inclusion and provides training and resources to equip a church to reach this goal. Resources include practical advice for changing the built environment, Bible studies, manuals and workshops.

"The Luke 14 program came about when CBM was dealing with disability in developing countries but very little was being done to address the issue at home," says Luke 14's Sydney co-ordinator, Louise Gosbell. "It wanted to do more to help churches become inclusive of disability."

"It has been a huge breakthrough in what we are doing in Australia, putting it on people's agendas. We go into churches and run training workshops – that could be an afternoon on disability in general or mental health, autism or other areas for kids and teens."

"We run workshops if a church has a child with autism and doesn't know what to do, or a general audit of church grounds. We can help them to make connections with disability organisations in their area, so the church can build up a relationship with a group home or a sheltered workshop and develop ministry opportunities."



Lights, camera, Jesus Club: Mel Fung (far left) rehearses The Sound of Music with Jesus Club members.

EVERYONE MATTERS TO GOD

Some of the churches linked to the Jesus Club, which began in 2006, have more readily come on board with the Diocese's plan to accommodate people with disability.

To the aim of the Jesus Club, a network of ministries that cater for people with intellectual disabilities, is to make Jesus known to people with disability in a way that is accessible to them.

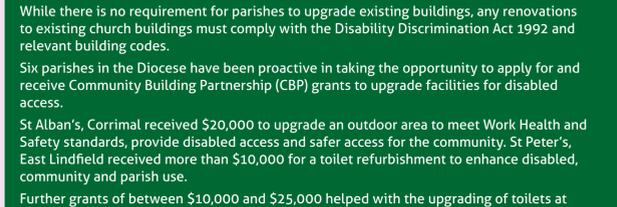
There are now six Jesus Clubs across Sydney in the parishes of Turramurra, Gladesville, Cammerburn-Cameray, Castle Hill, Jannali and Wild Street.

Psychologist and Jesus Club co-ordinator Mel Fung says the clubs are important because they display so accurately the message of Jesus Christ, which is an invitation to the kingdom of God for all people who humble themselves before him.

"People who are wealthy, of high status and gifted in the eyes of the world are usually not willing to accept God's rule over their lives, but those who are poor and vulnerable delight in God," she says.

Jesus Club tangibly displays this truth. Our members eagerly attend each session and gladly accept Jesus into their hearts. Ministries that reach out to university students and other capable members of society are terrific but don't as clearly display the message of Jesus Christ, a God who came to rescue the lost and needy."

Fung acknowledges that the ministry isn't fast or impressive-looking but "it reflects Jesus' attitude, which is to reach out to the orphans and widows and to preach good news to the poor. It's such a great witness to Jesus Christ, and many other people may come to the church when they see that it's different from the rest of society".



Love in action: Alison Evans (right) with a member of the Naremburn Jesus Club.

Alison Evans, from the Jesus Club in Naremburn, thinks those with intellectual disabilities can have a more difficult time integrating at church due to issues of communication and comprehension. "We are a very wordy organisation and concepts can be difficult," she says. "A church service is lots of talking and many of our members have poor receptive language."

More than half of Jesus Club members have very little speech and Evans says it strikes her how vulnerable and powerless they are – and yet "how courageous and persevering... as they struggle on, often cheerfully, with their very difficult lives. I am encouraged that God knows the Jesus Club members are here and can work with them, without having to let me know what is happening!"

Jesus Club is also looking for people to lend a helping hand at existing clubs and encourages churches everywhere to set up their own ministry. Jesus Club has resources, a leader training program and Safe Ministry guidelines.

WHY A RAMP IS A WELCOME MAT

SYNOD'S 2009 resolution called upon parishes and organisations to remove the obstacles that prevent people with disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship.

The mixed results of the 2010 survey of accessibility in churches (only 9 per cent of centres met the four main requirements for ramp access) concurred with a repeatedly expressed theme: that old buildings and low cash flow presented significant challenges.

People with disability cannot begin to participate if an environment is inhospitable but many simple changes can make a centre more accessible: the removal of a door handle, attention to a trip hazard, use of a consistent, large font PowerPoint template, and the installation of inexpensive portable ramps.

While there is no requirement for parishes to upgrade existing buildings, any renovations to existing church buildings must comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and relevant building codes.

Six parishes in the Diocese have been proactive in taking the opportunity to apply for and receive Community Building Partnership (CBP) grants to upgrade facilities for disabled access.

St Alban's, Corralba received \$20,000 to upgrade an outdoor area to meet Work Health and Safety standards, provide disabled access and safer access for the community. St Peter's, East Lindfield received more than \$10,000 for a toilet refurbishment to enhance disabled, community and parish use.

Further grants of between \$10,000 and \$25,000 helped with the upgrading of toilets at Jannali, a mobility ramp at Earlwood, a toilet and lighting upgrade at Wild Street in Maroubra, and a toilet upgrade at Arncliffe.

The next round of CBP grant applications will open soon.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

While Luke 14 and Jesus Club work on a volunteer model, Anglicare is the Diocese's only formally funded service provider.

Anna Green, the disability reform manager at Anglicare, says the organisation has challenges about its presence in the new world of disability services because it is a caring organisation. "We are trying to move from a philosophy of doing for people to doing with people, supporting people," she says. "Anglicare is an organisation that provides care and treats people in a caring way. People with disability prefer to be seen as supported rather than cared for."

CEO Grant Millard adds that Anglicare is driven by the concept of Christ's compassion and wanting to care by identifying and meeting need.

"The language in a disability space is very much a human rights, person-centred approach," he says. "Anglicare believes that everyone is made in the image of God, that people have inherent value and need to be honoured and treated with integrity. We must respect, build up and enable people living with disability to have choices, to help them to be resilient, to build on their strengths."

Anglicare seeks to support parishes and help them lift the veil on need that exists in their communities. But addressing disability inclusion in Anglican churches requires enormous change management – and attitudinal change.

Some parishes have not been enthusiastic about accommodating and working with people with disability, Millard says, because of the physical infrastructure that churches might need to change, or invest in, in order to be disability compliant.

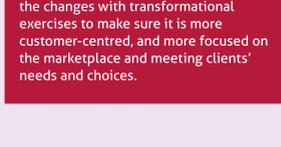
Churches often haven't been configured or designed in order to accommodate people with physical access issues, to build ramps, convert a toilet or provide lift access.

Green adds: "In the church context we can see people with physical disabilities in the pews but we don't often see people with intellectual disability or high levels of behavioural support needs. The needs of supporting a person in that environment, particularly a church service, are huge and people are not skilled to be able to do it and are frightened."

She says it is not just about how churches are set up to accommodate those with physical disabilities – such as people in wheelchairs, those who need hearing loops, or resources for people with sight problems. What is needed is an attitude of acceptance, welcoming and inclusion.

Churches could offer informal support for local families who have a person with a disability, including transport to appointments or social support for the carer.

Individuals in the congregation, meanwhile, can learn more about disability, be inclusive and support people with disability in mainstream activities of life – at church or in other social situations.



Anglicare support: Anna Green and CEO Grant Millard.

CHOICE AND CONTROL

BY allocating funding for disability services and support to people with disability themselves rather than to service provider organisations, and by introducing individualised funding packages, the National Disability Insurance Scheme aims to ensure Australians with disability enjoy far greater choice and control over all necessary services and supports.

The scheme, now in a trial period, will be fully implemented by 2018.

"The Government and society in general is being encouraged to normalise the inclusion of people with disability in everyday life," Anglicare CEO Grant Millard says. "The rest of society and the church, and parishes in general, need to accommodate the normality of people living with disabilities in their presence. It's just a bedrock issue about inclusiveness."

The new funding arrangement presents significant challenges to service providers.

Anglicare, aware of its responsibility to nearly 3000 clients, is facing the changes with transformational exercises to make sure it is more customer-centred, and more focused on the marketplace and meeting clients' needs and choices.

Creation and new creation

In this second part of his consideration of Psalm 104, **DAN WU** looks at the difference between the world's sinfulness, the joy of the psalm and how we should respond.

ONE OF THE SOMEWHAT PUZZLING THINGS ABOUT MANY OF THE PSALMS meditating on creation (e.g. Ps 8 & 139) is that they all have what is known as an "imprecatory" section in them – a section that refers to the judgement and destruction of the wicked. In Psalm 104 it comes right at the end: "May sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more" (v35).

While this may seem a somewhat rude and out of place insertion in a psalm meditating on the beauty and delight of creation – as if some dour editor has decided to put a wet towel on the whole thing at the end – in fact, this is the very point of it being there. There is a rude interruption to the flow of joy between God and his creation, a direct opposition to the delightful plans and purposes of God for his world, a rejection of the creator and his sovereignty and wisdom: sin.

Because we are so used to living in a world full of sin, this has trivialised the word into meaning something like "fun but a bit naughty". We can forget "the exceeding sinfulness of sin". But sin, as the Bible defines it – rejecting the Creator and attempting to rule our lives in his place – is *the* problem in the world. Psalm 104 makes this stand out even starker in relief: each part of the world lies in an interconnected web of total dependence on the wisdom of its Creator. When the world turns away from God, then, the result cannot be anything but darkness, death and decay, an inability to fulfil the glorious purposes for which it was made. Sin – turning away from God's self-giving love and faithfulness to his creation – becomes a sledgehammer that rips the world apart.

A WORLD BROKEN

This world, as we know it, is full of signs that things are not right, that things are a far cry from the picture of Psalm 104. We see homes and relationships painfully broken apart. We see millions starve while the world's resources go to waste. We see precious human lives oppressed and destroyed. But ultimately these are all merely symptoms: as it has famously been put, "the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart".

It is faithlessness that breaks homes and relationships. It is indifference that sees millions starve and the world's resources wasted. And it is selfishness and greed that oppresses and destroys lives. All these expose that the core problem with the world is not education, or poor wealth distribution, or equal opportunity. It is sin, in whose God-denying, self-seeking, life-destroying shackles we are helplessly and hopelessly bound.

As the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 1, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles".

In this light, it is perfectly fitting that the psalm ends with its urgent, passionate plea for sin – and for everyone who sets themselves against God, his people and his creation – to be done away with. Far from a mean-spirited, sub-Christian impulse, it is the heartfelt cry of one who perceives accurately that until sin is done away with the world can never know the true, life-giving freedom of the unhindered joy of God over his creation. But such a solution cannot come from the world itself, lost as we all are in darkness. It must come from God himself.

Thus the psalm of creation ultimately testifies to the gospel. That creation is saved through Christ's death and resurrection only makes sense because this is entirely consistent with the character of its creator and his plans for his creation. The world, created to receive and reflect the love and faithfulness of God – now bound in the self-centred darkness of its inhabitants – can only be freed by the one who, in the words of the apostle John, "became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only One from the Father, full of *grace and truth [or love and faithfulness]*" (John 1:14).

The Creator has entered his darkened creation and, in the person and work of his Son on the cross, made his grace (in forgiving sin) and truth (in judging it) known. It is only through the gospel that the wonderful goal of creation expressed in Psalm 104 is brought to pass and the great, sure hope of the Christian is that the salvation Christ won for us – begun in our lives even in this broken world – will be completed on the day of his return, when every obstacle to the Creator delighting in his creation is finally removed.

IMPLICATIONS

In light of Psalm 104 and its fulfilment in the gospel of Jesus Christ, let me summarise some of the implications for our lives.

• We are to delight in creation

Despite the pervasive effects of sin, it has not compromised God's sovereignty over creation, nor has it completely hindered his goodness continuing to fill the world. We are still able to experience and enjoy the goodness of God in what he has made, even though these experiences are limited and, because of sin, often fleeting or mingled with pain or sorrow.

The greeting cry of my 18-month-old son as I come home from work, the rush of pride and love that fills my heart as he stumbles into my arms and leans into my chest. The serenity and stillness of sitting on my favourite jetty, fishing rod in hand, chatting aimlessly with a mate while we wait (endlessly) for the elusive thrill of a tug on the line. The satisfying ache and exhaustion of tired muscles and sweat running down into my eyes, the sweetness of a drink of cold water after a hard game of touch footy. These are all small, hinting, fleeting – but real – signs of the continuing, generous love of the Creator whose glory it is to be determined to do good to his creatures, who continue to need him and his provision. If his gifts are received as such, and used (as far as possible) in accordance with and in proportion to his revealed purposes, then they lead us to honour and glorify him, as they should.

• We are to delight in the Creator

As such, enjoying the creation of God should never be an end in itself. As American preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards said, "God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven – fully to enjoy God – is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean [...] Why should we labour for, or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?"

Our enjoyment of creation should cause us to look beyond it to its source; the hints and tastes that earthly pleasure gives should cause us to seek our ultimate satisfaction only in our relationship with God. Indeed we must, because as the theologian Augustine once wrote, "You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in you".

When we try to find this satisfaction in anything created, we burden it with an impossible weight it was never meant to bear and end up twisting, distorting and destroying it and ourselves. The partner we think will fulfil our longings is crushed under the disappointed expectations we hold over them. The quick fix that numbs us to our problems momentarily, over time leads us to an oppressive dependence that robs us of the very freedom we had hoped for. It is only by coming into "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21), by binding ourselves in dependence upon the one for whom we were made, the only one who can give us satisfaction in himself, that true delight can be had and true life found.

• We are to delight in bringing God's delight to others

Finally, once freed and filled by God in the gospel, the way is opened for us to live as Psalm 104 calls us to live – to bring delight to God by bringing his delight to others, so that creation may be healed of its darkened, terminal condition and filled with God's joyful purposes.

As we seek to do this, Psalm 104 reminds us that "joyful"-type issues – social and ecological, for example – are of great importance. Our place as bearers of God's image in the world means that our relationships with our fellow humans, and our rule of God's earth under him, are critical concerns for us and warrant more thought and action on the part of (at least) contemporary Western Christians. I am thankful that there has been, of late, a growth in resources from an evangelical perspective to help us think through and take up the rebuke and challenge of more deliberately reflecting God's character in our actions towards each other and his world.

However, as we have seen, the psalm pushes us to see that there is a prior and primary need even beyond these: the need for sinful people to be reconciled to God through the gospel. In fact, Psalm 104 helps us to see that the two issues (evangelistic and social/ecological) are intimately related as cause and symptoms, much like an underlying disease has symptoms. The symptoms may be more immediately felt and apparent, but the real need is to be cured of the disease that causes them. There *will* be an important place for the relief of the symptoms. But focusing on dealing with the symptoms alone can never bring the desired healing. It is only when the disease itself is treated and overcome that wholeness can be restored.

Commenting on Peter's healing of the lame man in Acts 3, David Gooding notes that Peter's explanation of the healing quickly moves to Jesus' atoning death on the cross, and that making this man "whole" – physically and temporarily – pointed to the more fundamental wholeness of being made right with God through Jesus and the hope of eternal restoration at his return.

He concludes that we still need to hear Peter's exposition of the gospel because "our earth is not a self-created machine which just happens to have gone a little wrong but which we, with our increasing know-how and technology can put right, granted only international co-operation and a sincere effort on the part of everyone. Behind our earth and universe stand a personal Creator and personal Saviour. Not all the technological engineering, medical treatment, social aid, economic strategy, political prudence and education of the masses could finally solve them and produce a paradise, so long as the world remains at odds with its Creator and rejects its appointed Saviour... [so] let us not quit preaching. The world's pain is immense: but its prime and pressing need is to repent and be reconciled to God."

NEW CREATION JOY

Psalm 104 is a wonderful exposition of God's glorious purposes for his creation and for each one of us within it. Although the world – and our experience of it – is painfully marred by the effects of sin, it is still sustained and shot through with tastes, hints and experiences of its good and sovereign Creator. But there will come a day when all that hinders God from delighting completely in his creation, and his creation delighting in him, will be removed, and the tantalising, frustratingly brief tastes and hints will come to their soul-satisfying, eternal fulfilment.

The day that the Lord Jesus Christ returns to complete the victory he won over sin and death at the cross will be, for those who put their lives in his hands, the day of joy without end in the new creation. As God says through the apostle John:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev 21:1-4)

As God's people, then, let us by faith revel in our created life now, long for the new creation and all the while delight ourselves in bringing God's delight to others by proclaiming and living out the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to all. ☪

CHURCH CELEBRATES COOPER PEDY'S 100TH BIRTHDAY



Bush Church Aid and Catacomb Church in Coober Pedy have joined with the town to celebrate 100 years since its founding.

The town anniversary celebrations, which highlighted the long-standing connections the church has had with Coober Pedy, ran through April, with a team from Camden Haven Anglican Church in the Diocese of Newcastle pitching in as well.

"A group of nine people from Camden Haven church came and did a mission trip out here and helped run a number of different activities, as well as just putting their skills to use where need be," says the Rev Geoff Piggott, currently serving as the minister at Catacomb Church, supported by BCA. "There's an annual parade in town, which was obviously greatly enhanced by it being a 100th anniversary, and we were involved in that. There were a lot of people who came back to the Easter festival, people who had connections with us and the town and have been away – some for decades."

Mr Piggott's wife, Tracey, says the support of a mission team from outside their diocese was a particular help during the anniversary, which saw hundreds in town for the celebrations.

"I think one of the harder things in regional ministry is that there can be a sense of aloneness," she says. "So, to have a group of people who were committed to come and share their skills and energy was inspiring. I was saying I was exhausted and energised by the end of the week – that was what it felt like. That kind of partnering is so valuable."

Coober Pedy was founded on February 1, 1915 as an opal mining town. The Bush Church Aid Society provided medical assistance early on through the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the operation of the town's hospital, which was handed over to the Government in 1977.

"The relationship of Christians to this town historically has certainly been significant, but I think over time that relationship has become less important to the town," Mr Piggott says. "The links are still there, just in terms of the work of the church generally, but in other things as well. You have the road past the church called Catacomb Road, and off that you have BCA Road, and another is Medway Road, from when Kerry Medway was here. It was good for that significance to come up during the celebration as well."

The Piggotts have a diverse ministry running the local church, working regionally in outlying centres and properties, as well as connecting with tourists, many of whom venture into the church thanks to its distinctive shape.

"We mostly do things with the church here, but we're also a bit more wide-ranging," Mr Piggott says. "The parish here goes from Coober Pedy to the [Northern] Territory border, to the NSW western border, to the Western Australian border! We don't travel the full extent of that in practice, but we spend a lot of time on cattle stations, with regional Aboriginal groups and things like that, making maybe three trips out a year."

Disney destiny



Tricky future: Casey (Britt Robertson) and Athena (Raffey Cassidy) in *Tomorrowland*.

JUDY ADAMSON

Tomorrowland
Rated PG

F THE TITLE OF THIS FILM SOUNDS FAMILIAR, THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S ALSO THE NAME OF the imagination-filled futuristic portion of Disneyland. Given that this is also a Disney film, that means it must be all about the excitement and opportunity of the future, right?

Well, sort of. It's certainly aimed at a pre-teen or young teen audience, who are bound to enjoy the brilliant special effects, sci-fi elements and the rebellious, never-say-die attitude of the central character, Casey Newton (Britt Robertson). Having George Clooney in a pivotal role also adds credibility and gives the film a wider audience.

The story begins with Clooney talking to the camera about the uncertainty of the future thanks to corruption, war, famine, environmental degradation... you get the picture. But prompted by a young voice off screen (who we soon discover is Casey), he acknowledges that when he was a child the future was very different: it was bright, exciting and full of promise.

Cue a flashback to the 1964 New York World's Fair, when a young Frank Walker (Clooney) brings his homemade jet pack to an inventors' competition. While the judge (Hugh Laurie) seems unimpressed, behind him is a pretty girl named Athena (Raffey Cassidy) who gives Frank a Tomorrowland pin and encourages him to follow her and the judges once the competition is finished.

He does so and, after some impressive whizzbangery, finds himself in the high-tech wonderment of Tomorrowland. While it all looks amazing, Clooney's voiceover makes it clear the experience didn't end well for him.

Enter Casey, in modern-day Florida. A clever, optimistic girl, she's fascinated by the stars and frustrated that NASA is planning to dismantle its space launch pad nearby – either because she wants the possibilities of exploration to remain open or she hopes to keep her engineering dad (Tim McGraw) in work.

Her actions to save both land her in trouble, and this is when a remarkably unchanged Athena slips her a pin. Casey is stunned and excited by the short experience she has of Tomorrowland, and with Athena's help tracks down a middle-aged Frank to his high-tech hidey hole so she can find out more.

They are pursued at every turn by blaster-wielding police intent on stopping them – who, paradoxically, seem to have come from Tomorrowland. Why would such a future-focused, hopeful society become so violent and negative?

Casey finds that Frank has given up on the future, morosely watching worldwide crises and devastation with a sense of hopelessness. However, in talking to Casey he senses that hope is still possible and so, with Athena, they race the "police" to the only remaining entry point back to Tomorrowland to save the world.

That last observation might sound a bit glib, but essentially that's what *Tomorrowland* is about. That opportunity and a bright, exciting future will only be possible if the smart, forward-thinking optimists never give up and forge ahead to create it.

It is a clarion call to the younger generation to see problems and do what their elders have not done: fix them. Change the world. Change our future. A heroic, flag-waving thought, but how we actually do that isn't so clear.

George Clooney's ongoing efforts to expose injustice, environmental damage and fight hard for a better, fairer planet make him the logical choice as Frank, and he has the gravitas and style to carry it off. Britt Robertson is fine as Casey, although her character isn't really given much scope to grow. She's the most optimistic person on earth, believes anything is possible and that you can make your own destiny, so there's not much of a character arc there.

The real standout for me is the young Raffey Cassidy as Athena. Her emotional range and depth are extraordinary, and you really don't want to look at anyone else when she's onscreen – which is pretty impressive when she's sharing it with George Clooney and Hugh Laurie.

Add to that a sensational spread of special effects and you can certainly have a great time watching *Tomorrowland*. Just remember that this is the world according to Disney, where sinfulness is a wicked stepmother who gets her comeuppance in the end, a mean ruler who won't let love and justice flourish, or simply a desire to eat too much chocolate.

So, should we look optimistically to the future? Absolutely – being well aware that placing hope solely in ourselves, our inherent goodness and our capacity to change the world for the better has not worked well to date. It doesn't mean we stop fighting for justice but, in faith, our hope (thankfully) lies elsewhere.

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NICK GILBERT

CHRISTIAN BAND GARAGE HYMNAL IS SHUTTING UP SHOP FOR THE FORESEEABLE future, with their final show in Sydney taking place in June.

After five albums, one EP, many live performances at conventions, churches and other locations, as well as a series of workshops and seminars – is parting ways simply because the members are now doing different things.

"We've just gotten to a point where our lives are going in different directions now," says one of the band's vocalists, Steph Vanden Hengel. "Making music is a very full-time kind of thing and when you do it part-time it gets tricky. I have a six-month-old baby, Alannah's getting married and moving overseas, Greg has a new job – everyone's just moving into new spaces."

Garage Hymnal is perhaps best known for its treatment of the hymn "Take My Life", which was rearranged by Beth Manchester and then recorded for the group's self-titled debut album in 2005.

"The beauty of Beth's version was always that it took a part of the first verse and turned it into the chorus," Vanden Hengel says. "That's the pinnacle of the song, for me, and those lyrics especially. That was what convinced me the hymns needed to be reshared."

The group operated as a musicians' collective of 40+ members for the first two albums, incorporating prewritten and original material across pop, R&B and rock genres. Many songs were based on old hymns and choruses, and the band's push to reinterpret these kinds of tunes was arguably at the forefront of the new hymn movement in mainstream evangelical music.

By the group's third album, the lineup had become a smaller, touring eight-person band, with the sound shifting from an eclectic "taster" experience to a more focused, alternative-pop sound that increasingly incorporated elements of folk. It also saw a more thematic approach to songwriting, such as on their fourth album, *Unity*.

"We recorded that album as a live album, and it felt like a practical outworking of what we were actually singing about," says guitarist Greg Cooper. "We had many denominations with us that night. It didn't really matter who was there, in a way, but it felt like that in itself was what we were talking about in song."

Part of the band's mission has also been to work directly with musicians and churches through workshops, song transcriptions and, with the rise of social media and online streaming, video tutorials. This has seen Garage Hymnal trek the country, from blockbuster conventions such as the One Conference in 2011 to small rural churches.

One particular gig at a small church during Easterfest stands out to the group. "An older member of the congregation came up to Andy and I at the end of the night," says guitarist Rich Fenton. "He said, 'Personally, I didn't really care for it but I'd like to say it was great. The best thing today was for us to see young people come from the festival to worship here.' His entire theory was that you don't make church for you, you make church for new people to know God."

Their final Sydney show, on June 27 at the Garrison Church in Millers Point, will see the current six-piece lineup reunited with founding member Andy Judd, who left the band in 2012.

"We will play deep cuts [lesser-known album tracks] for sure," Cooper says. "We'll also play the songs that people will expect, which is good and right. There'll be congregational singing, a slideshow, all that kind of thing. It's nice to not peter out but have a moment to say thanks and share the last 10 years again with everyone."

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Till ratings us do part

BILL SALIER

Married At First Sight
Channel Nine



At Roni and Michael's wedding

Celebrant: "...You've not made this decision lightly." Roni: "You think?"

HAVE YOU CAUGHT UP WITH MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT YET? PERHAPS YOU'VE BEEN avoiding it – although with the media saturation that wouldn't have been easy. It began airing last month and follows a slew of reality "dating" shows: *The Bachelor*, *Beauty and the Geek*, *When Love Comes to Town*, and so on. The premise is simple enough: it follows the fortunes of four couples as they meet at the altar and "marry" at first sight. Participants are chosen and matched, we are told, by three "relationship experts": two psychologists and a neurotherapist – but the show is, in fact, a *Perfect Match*.

However, this not a dating show. According to the makers it is a "social experiment" with more of a "documentary feel". That sounds more respectable. But what to think? Is this a show we should snog, marry or avoid?

Many don't like it, for a range of reasons. Despite the claims to objectivity it has that voyeuristic element of reality television. One suspects this may be an opportunity for the participants to become that most dubious of species: a "celebrity". Not to mention that at first blush it looks like yet another assault on marriage – a trivialising of its value.

A petition was even launched to ask Nine to not broadcast the show with its chief concern that the couples were apparently marrying. This has been clarified. Australian law puts the brakes on quick marriages, with the requirement of a month and a day's notice. However, the couples *do* embark on a "commitment ceremony" (in full regalia) with the intention of committing fully to the union for the duration of the "experiment" and then formalising it if they decide to proceed. So *Married at First Sight* is a little more like a dating show than the title might suggest.

There is a lot not to like and it would be simple to condemn, move on and change channel. However, let's reflect for a moment further. Is there anything to be said?

The show has been spoken of as a Western-style arranged marriage – a difficult concept for a Western democracy with its high value on individual choice. This despite estimates that as many as 55 per cent of marriages globally involve some sort of arrangement.

Do arranged marriages work better and, if they do, how important are cultural factors? This can't be answered in six episodes, though it is interesting to note that, of the first three couples in the US version, two are still persisting. Certainly *Married at First Sight* is another contribution to our culture's confusing dialogue about marriage. Do we like it or not? The marriage rate decreased slightly in 2013, as did the divorce rate; yet statistics show that around 40 per cent of marriages will still end in divorce. In the public arena marriage is disparaged and praised, deemed unnecessary by many and highly valued by others, especially as the debate over same-sex unions rumbles on.

Is this another step in the humiliation of marriage or does it just affirm our culture's view... by all means give it a go and if it doesn't work, simply walk away? It certainly looks like another claim by our techno-savvy society that we might be able to get it right if we just have enough data and experts. All this reminds us that we live a long way east of Eden and that the Christian perspective is increasingly of the alien and stranger variety.

On the other hand, *Married at First Sight* and other "relationship" TV shows point to a continuing fascination with what makes personal relationships work. They point, in their own way, to the frustration of living in a world where lasting love can be hard to find.

Some of the show's participants are onto their second marriage (or more), with the first episode offering a poignant mixture of their hopes, fears and expectations. This had the ring of truth and points to the importance of relationships – including the permanent, committed, exclusive, other-person-centred relationship promised by marriage at its best. It is hard not to feel this is being exploited for commercial interests here, and this is always objectionable, but there is an ideal buried away that gives us something to think and talk about.

No doubt we are right to feel real disquiet at a such a show but there may be an opportunity in the lunch room to at least broach the subject of what makes marriages work. We can affirm the importance of marriage and the goodness of God's gift to us. We can point to Scripture's teaching concerning other-person centredness, of bearing with one another in love, and of the mechanisms of repentance and forgiveness that are so essential to maintaining relationships. We can point to the truth that compatibility and love can grow and must also flex and commit for the long haul as the people in the relationship inevitably grow and change.

There is a story to be told and it is a good one but if it is a story that must also be lived. I doubt we will ever see a show called *Married Christians* but if we did what would we see? Would we discover that we are simply following the world on this one? *Married at First Sight* might not be worth a second look as a TV show but it might give us an opportunity to look again and consider the more excellent way pointed to in the Scriptures.

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Dr Bill Salier is the principal of Youthworks College.