



DEC
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Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

Passport to change

CHRISTIANS AND TRAVEL



Grieving well



Gospel joy in Syria



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More and more people are coming to Christ, and evangelism, in fact, it is easier now.

Pastor Samir Yacco
World News

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Christians in NSW awards

State Australians of the Year with their awards: (from left) NSW Local Hero, Eddie Woo; NSW Australian of the Year, Professor Michelle Simmons; NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian; Dr Alison Morgan, accepting the NSW Senior Australian of the Year award on behalf of her aunt, Dr Catherine Hamlin; and NSW Young Australian of the Year, Macinley Butson. PHOTO Salty Dingo

ANGLICAN OBSTETRICIAN DR CATHERINE HAMLIN AC HAS BEEN NAMED AMONG THE NSW winners in the Australian of the Year awards, recognising a lifetime of work in the field of women's health among the poor in Africa.

Dr Hamlin, who received the NSW Senior Australian of the Year Award, has spent more than 50 years as an obstetrician in multiple countries in Africa, principally in Ethiopia where, along with her late husband Dr Reg Hamlin, she founded a hospital in Addis Ababa to create a local foundation for women's medicine.

A key component of the work has been to provide fistula repair surgery for women who suffer otherwise preventable injuries during childbirth, but who lack the financial means or access to receive proper health care.

Christian faith has played a key role in the work. The Hamlins arrived in Addis Ababa in 1959 unattached to any mission organisation – motivated simply by their faith, the huge need they saw, and the lack of aid being offered to women in particular.

The network of services overseen by Dr Catherine Hamlin has blossomed into a major operation encompassing six hospitals across the country. A midwifery college has been established and the work has expanded to other African countries, such as Uganda. More than 50,000 women have been treated, and the organisation has also trained other surgeons in the Hamlins' technique.

Almost 60 years later, Dr Hamlin is still active in clinical practice in her Ethiopian hospitals at the age of 93.

Another notable NSW recipient is Eddie Woo, a Christian mathematics teacher who shot to internet fame through his YouTube channel "Wootube", which explains high school maths concepts in an engaging fashion. He was recognised with the Local Hero award.

The road to Damascus



Back to school: Pastor Yacco gives school resources to local students.

"MY CHILDREN SAID THAT WE COULDN'T HAVE TWO MARTYRS IN THE FAMILY – SO I WAS THE one sacrificed!"

Pastor Samir Yacco says this with a smile, making light of the fact that his wife and children live in the safety of the United States while he returned to strife-torn Syria to pastor a church.

Pastor Yacco told remarkable stories of his work when he visited Sydney for talks with Anglican Aid last month. Syria has been wracked by six years of civil war with bombings, food and medical shortages and an estimated 50 per cent of the population forced from their homes.

In the midst of this, Samir Yacco pastors a Baptist church in the capital, Damascus. As well as leading his own congregation he provides emergency assistance to many internally displaced people who have fled the fighting in other parts of the country.

"The crisis was a surprise," he says. "We never expected that one day, we would be facing what we are facing."

Hopes were high when a freedom movement emerged in Syria in 2011 but, Pastor Yacco adds, "When the [freedom] movement was Islamised, we began to be afraid. We knew what would happen, because we had a lesson from what happened in Iraq."

This has taken its toll on the Christian population. "When the French left Syria in 1946, Christians were 20 per cent [of the population] – we even had a Presbyterian Prime Minister," he says. "When Tony Blair visited [in 2001] it was 12 per cent. I believe now it is 6 per cent."

Pastor Yacco has also been caring for a former Anglican congregation since the war began. Before then, he worked with a string of Australians including Jim Doust, Andrew Lake and Peter Smart. It was through the Smarts the church was introduced to the Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid and the Damascus church aid program began.

"Before the crisis, our church was of 80 adult members – we knew each other – all of a sudden we saw many people coming," he says. "We had no experience in managing a crisis but the Lord helped us. The Lord is seeing us through."

Pastor Yacco shows pictures of the old church building with its entrance jammed with people.

"Our old building wasn't enough for the newcomers and there was no emergency exit... if fire broke out we would all be charcoal," he says.

"When we were praying, there was a neighbouring house and when the old lady passed away her family sold the house to us. A French organisation helped us enlarge the hall and areas for Sunday school."

Amid the rubble of Damascus, other locals thought they were stupid to invest in a building.

"But actually when the order came from above we couldn't say no – trust and obey," he says. "Now, we have more than doubled our space. We can seat 250 people and we often have more. More and more people are coming to Christ, and evangelism, in fact, it is easier now."

The church has many ways to help those forced from their homes in other parts of the country. "The primary need is food, medication, accommodation and some household goods," Pastor Yacco says.

"We have a big event called Back to School – we are planning to help 400 kids. The whole school year costs something like \$50 [per child]. We give them stationery, school bags, textbooks, notebooks and we are planning to increase the number if are able to."

Other help includes an annual Bible distribution where the congregation goes to public places such as gardens and parks and sets up distribution tables.

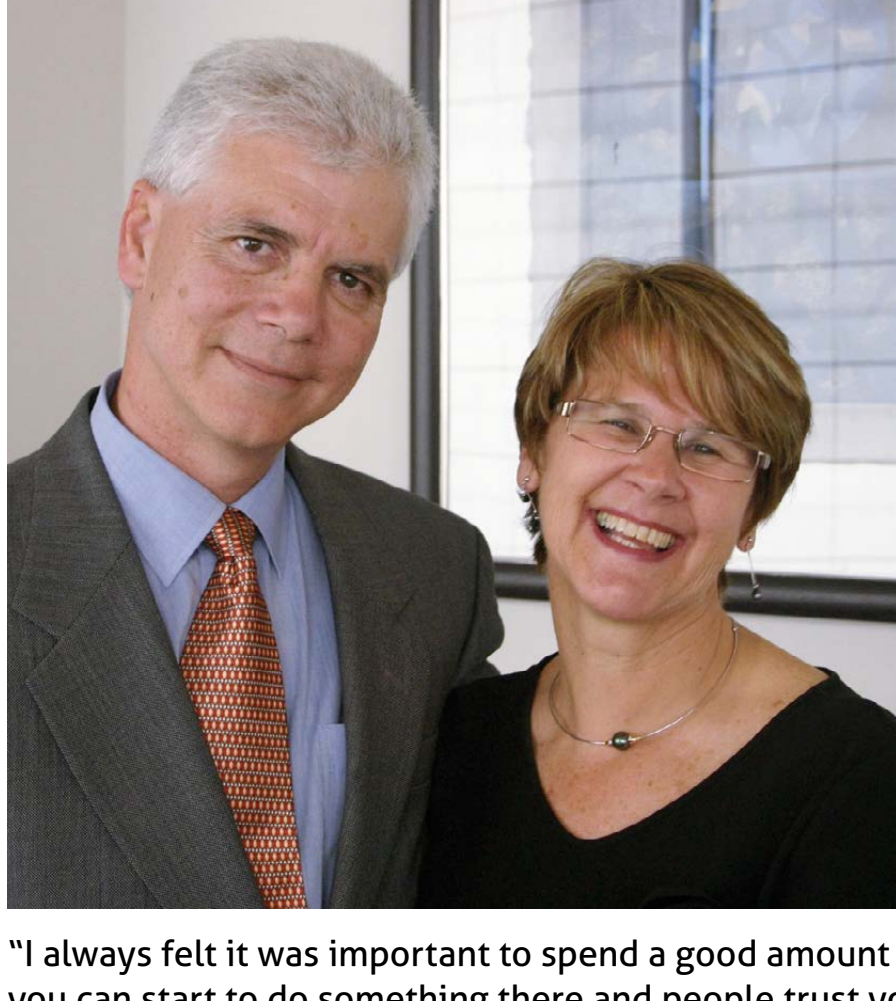
"To those who are newly displaced we give blankets, pillows and household goods," he says. "On Mothers' Day, to any woman, we give 300 coupons to go to the church store to get rations of food. Twice a month we have a meals on wheels. We serve families something we know they can't afford like meat or a kebab. The kids especially appreciate it."

Listening to Pastor Yacco's enthusiasm in the face of a long line of refugees, it is clear the gospel is a shining beacon in a difficult place.

Then he turns to photos of a treasured moment. An Afghani family, which went to Iran through UNHCR, found themselves in Damascus for processing. The church made contact with their son Daniel through youth group. He accepted Christ and told the gospel to his whole family. The 12 members of the family are now in Greece, but not before Pastor Yacco baptised them all in the church's new building.

"Trust and obey – isn't that right?" he asks, echoing the old hymn. "To be happy in Jesus, you trust and obey."

BOWRAL FAREWELLS



"I always felt it was important to spend a good amount of time in a parish if you're the rector, because then you can start to do something there and people trust you.

"I felt 10 years was a good time in a parish... before 10 years are up you've got to have a good reason to leave, and after 10 years you've got to have a good reason to stay. I've sought to take the congregation to the next stage, and then it's up to the next person."

The "next stage" for Bowral has included a major redevelopment of the parish facilities. Most of the church buildings are more than 100 years old and less practical for some of the needs of a 21st-century church. Now, the "fantastic" old buildings are complemented by a range of modern facilities that are of particular benefit to the growing contemporary service and youth and children's ministries.

As Mr Fifer begins to look beyond St Jude's, he is open to a range of possibilities.

"I don't want to stop ministry, so I'm going to be looking for ways to serve," he says. "Maybe I can do that assisting someone else, or maybe I can do locums, or maybe I can go and work in some other part of Australia or the world.

"But first I've got to find a roof over my head and I haven't organised that yet. The congregation have said I can't take the rectory with me!"

"new" ROSEMEADOW RECTOR

The **Rev Brett Hall** – assistant minister at Rosemeadow since the beginning of 2014 – was made presbyter on November 30 and also inducted as rector of the parish.

He explains that, while studying at Moore College in 2011, he "deliberately went looking for a region of Sydney to plant a church. Nigel Fortescue persuaded me to come to Campbelltown as a student minister, looking to stay for the long haul afterwards. We were exploring options to plant a new congregation with Campbelltown, but instead the opportunity presented itself to come to Rosemeadow".

Mr Hall describes the way things worked out as "a little unusual", but it was tailored for Rosemeadow's needs. When he arrived fresh out of college in 2014 as assistant minister – with local Bishop Peter Hayward as his acting rector – Rosemeadow's previous rector the Ven Deryck Howell and his wife Glenda also stayed on for the first couple of years "to support what was being done". The Rev Chris Moroney took on the acting rector's role at the beginning of 2016, when the parish also brought on a full-time assistant minister.

"There was a small but really faithful group that had persevered [before I arrived] and were already looking outwards," Mr Hall says. "Because I'd been doing the church planting exploration, we also had a group of people who were prepared to deliberately come and join us, and humbly integrated into the existing congregation. Campbelltown, where I had been beforehand, is the parish next door, so we could slowly ease new people in so it wasn't a shock to the existing congregation.

"And then in a lot of ways we just tried to do good ministry in the same way you'd do it anywhere else. There was no one single thing that worked, but over time people started coming to church, heard the gospel, got loved and stayed."

Mr Hall says 2017 has been a "big year" for Rosemeadow, with an evening congregation starting up in June and a range of ministries set up to keep the church moving forward.

"We've also started a partnership with Vocational Bible College," he says. "Both me and my assistant Michael [Kinsey] are teaching classes during the week... and just keeping on doing the things we've been doing: kids' ministry, youth ministry, and trying to create a congregation where people love one another deeply."



PARSON'S PLEASURE IN PARISH

After 36 years of ordained ministry in the northern and northwestern suburbs of Sydney, the **Rev Geoff Collison** retired from his position as rector of Beecroft on October 31.

Although parish ministry was his long-term intention, Mr Collison first trained and worked as a high school science teacher before beginning studies at Moore College in the late 1970s.

Following his ordination in 1981, he spent two years as curate at St Paul's, Chatswood before taking up two part-time roles: one as assistant minister to the parish of Denistone-East Marsfield, and the other as a chaplain at Macquarie University.

However, after five years in this dual role, he was then asked to become rector at Denistone-East Marsfield, where he stayed until called to Beecroft in 2000.

"They threw an Olympic Games in Sydney to celebrate my arrival!" he jokes.

"It was a happy time," he adds. "It was a good time... Beecroft is a parish where people take initiative and mostly that's what happened. [I sought to] provide an environment in which they could do that."

Mr Collison says part of his aim at Beecroft was to let church members exercise their gifts "rather than being the sole source of ministry". Over the past 17 years, with his full support, ministries have begun or grown in ESL, care ministries and work with children, teenagers and young adults.

While there isn't a "grand plan" as far as retirement is concerned, Mr Collison still aims to continue in parish ministry wherever he finds himself – whether in his new home church at Katoomba or in locum work.

"I like ministry in parishes," he says. "It's the sort of thing I still want to do."



in 1979 for Mr Woodbridge to take up the post of rector at Berry with Kangaroo Valley, and working in his beloved Nowra parish as honorary assistant minister from 2010.

"David was a gift of encouragement to our whole ministry team," Mr Thompson said at his funeral. "To Josh, encouragement in his development as a young minister. To Jai as an assistant nearing the time to take his own parish. And to me, words of wisdom from a rector past, of 17 years, to a new rector in a hurry – words about the people and pulpit he loved and guarded so determinedly and tenderly.

"Yet regardless of how David has encouraged us in life, today there is only one encouragement for us to grasp... the words of 1Thessalonians 4: the call to us to encourage one another with these words. And so we will. And so we must. These are words of hope.

"David loved the trumpet. But he loved Jesus more. David laid down his trumpet to live his life in Christ, so that his ear would be tuned to the one trumpet note that mattered – the note that recalls him from the grave. Hope is the anticipation of that one trumpet note."

.....

The **Rev David Woodbridge** died on August 3, 2017, aged 81.

Born David Charles Woodbridge on May 31, 1936, the young David was a talented trumpeter, playing in big bands at venues like the Trocadero. He was an active member of his church but also loved his trumpet, practising three times a day.

The Rev Geoff Thompson, rector at Mr Woodbridge's parish of Nowra, takes up the story: "His minister challenged him that he may need to weigh which would have his greater allegiance, trumpet or Christ. He was deciding to give up the trumpet to make Christ everything when one day he was coming home from a gig on the train, jumped off at his stop and realised as the train was pulling out that he'd left his precious trumpet on the train seat.

"He watched as the train pulled away; the decision was made. He never went back to the trumpet and gave himself to a life of serving others, to proclaim Christ."

Mr Woodbridge studied at Moore College from 1958-1961 and undertook a curacy at Bowral before offering for missionary service with CMS in the Northern Territory. He was chaplain at the Roper River mission (now Ngukurr) in 1964-65, before returning to St Andrew's Hall in Melbourne for training the following year.

The family then went back to Ngukurr and Groote Eylandt for another 12 years, returning to Port Kembla. In 1984 he became rector of All Saints', Nowra, where he stayed until his official retirement in 2001.

Mr Woodbridge remained busy in ministry for the rest of his life, spending 2003 as acting rector at Berry with Kangaroo Valley, and working in his beloved Nowra parish as honorary assistant minister from 2010.

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Deaconess Val Moore died on October 16, 2017, aged 85.

Valerie Moore was born in the Sutherland Shire on September 10, 1932. After hearing the Rev Ken Roughley – the minister at her local church of St Luke's, Miranda – preach the gospel in the early 1950s, she "realised God loves even me" and put her faith in the Lord from that day onwards.

Miss Moore trained at Deaconess House in the mid-1950s, gaining her Licentiate in Theology, she was ordained a deaconess on June 11, 1958. She also subsequently completed a Bachelor of Arts (1967) and an MA (1974) at the University of Sydney.

Deaconess Moore worked as an editor at the Anglican Board of Education in Sydney for 20 years from 1958. She could never speak highly enough of the Diocese's director of education at that time, the Rev Canon Alan Langdon – "a most intelligent, humble and godly man" – and loved editing the materials written for teaching the Bible to children.

Family concerns and ill health forced Dss Moore to leave her work in 1978, although – ever the history buff – she happily hand-wrote a range of historical notes for Anglican Deaconess Ministries about its early years.

Dss Moore spent many years of her retirement teaching SRE – first in the western Sydney suburb of Llandilo and then in the New England town of Manilla, 40 minutes' northwest of Tamworth where an "adopted" family of close friends live.

In writing to other retired deaconesses and female deacons about her life in 2012, her first thought was that "all the way the Lord has blessed me". She was a deaconess for more than 59 years.



Evangelistic urgency

Mark Thompson's excellent article in last month's *Southern Cross* clearly and strongly made the biblical case for the urgency of evangelism in our post-Christian society. The question remains, how? What are our tactics? What is our strategy? The days of Billy Graham mass rallies are over, and if we wait for unbelievers to turn up at church we will be waiting a long time!

Why not try the first-century apostolic strategy where every member of every church is a missionary? Within half a generation they grew from a small group in a remote corner of the Roman Empire into the people who "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). They did this by not leaving the task of mission to the apostles or the evangelists or the leaders, but by putting all the troops on the battlefield.

1 Thessalonians gives us a textbook case where Paul and his missionary team came to Thessalonica, worked and preached and established the church (Acts 17:1-10) And what next? Paul writes to tell them *all* to do what they had seen and heard him doing:

- a. living the gospel, and
- b. speaking the gospel.

That's how the early church spread – everyone was a missionary! The generals can't fight a battle on their own – the infantry has to be out on the front line. Lay Christians are on the front line every working day but unless they are trained, equipped, motivated and inspired to see their workplace (neighbourhood, school etc.) as their mission field, and themselves as active missionaries, all we will have is the generals back at headquarters theorising.

Kel Richards
Lindfield

Lost confidence

Margaret Elder (Letters, November) is correct. Many practising Anglicans believe we have lost credibility – and I say that in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation! Cranmer was instrumental in establishing the *Book of Common Prayer*, the practices and principles of which so many young Anglican clergy have happily abandoned, but not the security inherent in their appointments. Parishioners need to have confidence in parish rectors and that is now lacking in so many cases.

Reg Lobb
Stanwell Park

Gender report

If your story from Synod on the gender report (SC, November) is a reasonable summary of the actual report, I am very disappointed. There is ample medical literature to demonstrate that not all humans are born with XY or XX chromosomes. Some have only one; some have three or four. At the genetic level, sexuality is not invariably binary. Medical literature also abounds with similar abnormalities referring to anatomical, hormonal and developmental criteria in cases where gender has to be "assigned", often with surgical intervention. Has the committee considered this evidence? If so, what are their thoughts on how this information should be integrated into their program? It seems this report takes as an assumption that there is a "binary distinction between male and female". This is true in most cases, but when it is applied specifically to those individuals who are outside that assumed normal range it cannot be a sound basis for pastoral care. If you start with a false assumption, you end with a false conclusion. A program of pastoral care based on this approach will do nothing except continue harm to those it would claim to be helping.

Bob Springett
Ermington



Clipboard connections

DAVID MANSFIELD

SEVERAL TIMES THIS YEAR, WHILE VISITING CHURCHES, I HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY HOW THE clipboard seems to be making a comeback as the most reliable means of communication with parishioners.

This is not a one-off observation. It has happened on half a dozen occasions and counting. And no, these were not tech-shy churches but as tech-savvy as any you would like to imagine.

Here are two examples.

St Broadband planned to hold a dinner and asked those who wanted to come to book in online. The event had to be postponed, as there were only 16 takers.

When the dinner was rescheduled, out came the clipboard. People signed up before and after Sunday church and the event went ahead with something north of 120 people in attendance.

This church is wall-to-wall data projection, PowerPoint and plasma, from porch to podium. But it was the trusty old clipboard, with a warm person-to-person invitation from church staff, that pushed a commitment-shy membership across the line. And it was a great night.

St Megapixel's story is somewhat different. The rector announced, with a hint of exasperation, that he was passing around a clipboard during announcements at the church service because nobody was responding to his email requests. He even expressed a fear that the emails were being trashed without being opened!

Around came the generations-old, corner-cracked, spring-loaded, finger-biting, thumb-bruising, brown chipboard clipboard, complete with surface rust and an HB pencil attached to the metal clip by a bit of tired-looking string. It was straight from the archives, or the museum. I wondered whether it needed a termite inspection certificate.

Of course, in some places the clipboard has never been superseded – and in some of the most important places of all. I visited a friend in hospital recently and there it was at the foot of the bed, where it has always been, for a century – if not more.

There may have been tablets in a little plastic tub on the patient's bedside table, but no tablets at the foot of the bed. There may be electrical monitors beeping away above the patient's head, but the clipboard continues to be the technology of choice when the doctor does his rounds and wants reliable information at his fingertips.

Another place is the stadium. We may have refs with banks of plasma TVs, electronic scoreboards with instant replays from every angle, and state-of-the-art communication technology between the on-field and off-field arbiters. But I still notice, in AFL football matches at least, that the preferred mode of communication at quarter and three-quarter time is the portable whiteboard and marker pen.

Are there any lessons to be learnt in all of this? Not too many, I'm sure, but there is an important one that comes to mind.

There is an immediacy in the clipboard that evokes action, rather than acquiescence, decision rather than delay. There is something more personal in the clipboard when it is accompanied by a warm invitation from the front, or a one-on-one encounter at the door or over refreshments.

While electronic communication invites indecision, and – with the avalanche of invitations that come this way – indifference and disconnection, the clipboard has a retro and personal winsomeness about it.

Connecting the world by various forms of electronic media, both in current and yet-to-be imagined forms, will always be with us. But the success of the humble clipboard does say something about the shortcomings of social media, as well as the irreplaceable benefits of personal connections that are being lost with a rapidity that is frightening.

As basic and simple as it is, it provides a helpful reminder to us – and our churches – that relationships and everyday human connections are just as important as they ever were. Sometimes the best way to serve people, and connect them to each other, is face to face and without the fancy technology.

The Rev David Mansfield is director of the Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid.

Celebrating the Lord of history



● DR GLENN DAVIES
● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

THE FOUR GOSPELS EACH HAVE A DIFFERENT WAY OF COMMENCING THEIR STORY about Jesus. Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy, whereas Mark introduces us to some Old Testament prophecies before launching into John the Baptist's ministry as an introduction to Jesus. Luke opens with an explanation of his sources and his reasons for writing, before relating the birth of John the Baptist, whereas John begins at the beginning – the creation of the world by the Word of God, who becomes enfleshed in the person of Jesus.

Intriguingly, each Evangelist mentions John the Baptist, but only Matthew and Luke devote any time to the birth narrative of Jesus, while Luke also includes the birth of John the Baptist. Although both Matthew and Luke include a genealogy of Jesus, it is Matthew alone who begins his Gospel with a genealogy. One might well ask: Why? Aren't lists of people's births, "A begat B, B begat C..." just the kind of turn-off that one might expect from a preoccupied archivist obsessed with ancient lists of genealogies and a devotee of ancestry.com?

Clearly Matthew did not think so, and neither should we. Matthew wanted his readers, especially his Jewish readers, to know that the birth of Jesus was steeped in history and prophecy. It was not an accidental birth in a random time and place. It was preordained, it was prepared by God before the world began, and it was promised through Israel's prophets that an anointed king would one day come to reign.

That day had now dawned! When our English bibles translate the Greek word for Messiah as "Christ" we tend to think of this as a surname for Jesus without reflecting upon the uniqueness of this title and its connection with Old Testament prophecy – that God would one day send his "anointed one" (literally "messiah"). He would be a descendant of Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, and he would be a lineal descendant of King David. Hence Matthew opens his Gospel: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham".

Every Jewish reader would understand the potency of these words. The long-expected Messiah has come. To prove his contention, Matthew then proceeds to demonstrate the fulfilment of this prophecy by tracing the line of descent of Jesus' sonship from Abraham, and David. Of this genealogy two things are noteworthy.

The first is the inclusion of non-Israelites, both of whom were women (Rahab and Ruth), in the lineage of Jesus. While the mention of women was not unusual in genealogical lists, especially of royal line, it is as if Matthew wishes his readers to know that true sonship is not determined merely by "bloodline".

While Jesus' earthly ministry may have been specific to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24), the ministry he left for his disciples was to *all* nations (Matthew 28:18-19; cf 21:43; 22:9). The true child of Abraham is the one born of faith. Those who do not evidence repentance are not true children of Abraham (Matthew 3:9).

Indeed, God could raise up stones to be children of Abraham, leaving unbelieving Israelites, despite their "pure" lineage, under God's judgment. Many will come from east and west to feast with Abraham at God's table (Matthew 8:11).

The second thing to note is that Matthew's genealogy is condensed. He omits a number of persons that the genealogy of 1 Chronicles 1 includes. His reason is not to save papyrus but to make a theological point. You will note that he highlights 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to Exile, and 14 from Exile to Jesus (2x7 + 2x7 + 2x7). This is Matthew's cryptic way of using the number seven, a figure of completeness, to establish the beginning of the seventh seven, the dawn of fulfilment, with the arrival of King Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

We shall celebrate many things this Christmas, but let us remember that our God is Lord of all history. He knows the end from the beginning. He promised that his Messiah would come and he delivered. He promised the inclusion of all nations and he delivered. He promised the perfection of creation, and he will deliver when Jesus returns to wrap up the "seventh seven" and bring in everlasting righteousness.

As we celebrate his birth, let us also look forward to his second coming and the arrival of the new heavens and new earth.

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

See the world God's way

Hidden treasures: Anh Ton visits the caves at Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.

The world is closer than ever and people are making the most of it, with short-term trips abroad doubling in the past decade. But should there be anything different about the way Christians use their passports? **TARA SING** writes.

VERSEAS TRAVEL IS NOT A NEW CONCEPT, BUT AS AIRFARES AND TRAVEL times drop it has become accessible for many more people. With holiday snaps no longer hidden in dusty albums but flooding our social media feeds, it feels like everyone is overseas.

Travel in and of itself is not a bad thing. It's good to be able to visit far-away friends and family with ease, explore God's creation and experience different cultures and places. But there are other reasons people head overseas, and a number of Christians are choosing to spend their time abroad for a variety of faith-based reasons. Some people head to the "holy" lands, visiting biblical and historical sites. Others travel to see and support the work of aid organisations, ministries and missionaries.

But what is it that makes this Christian travel different? Is there something deeper about these journeys? Are these investments a worthwhile use of time and money?



In their footsteps: Colin Bannerman crosses the Sea of Galilee towards Capernaum. PHOTO: Lyn Bannerman

THE RISE OF FAITH TRAVEL

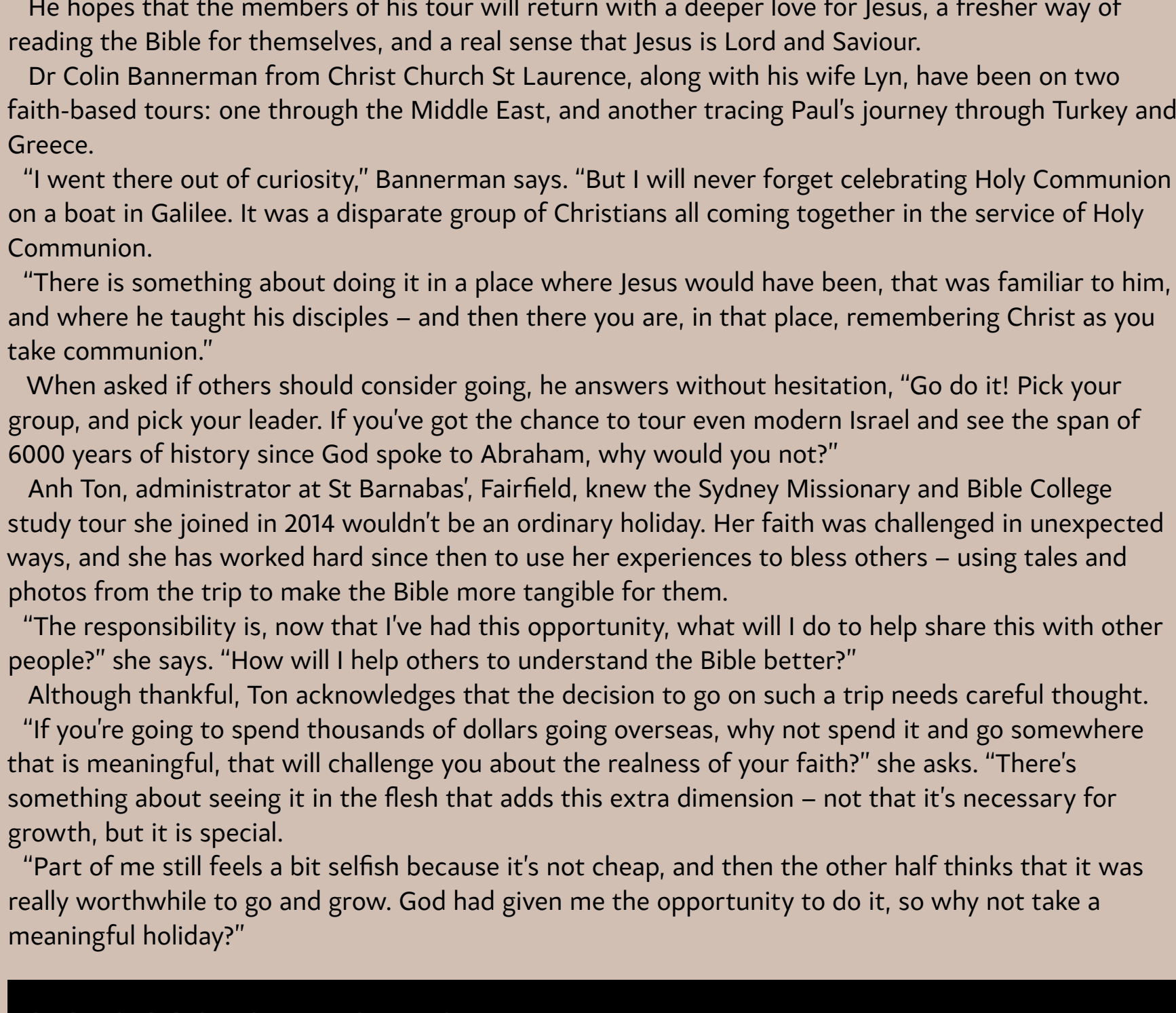
"If given the opportunity to lie on a beach, people don't think twice about it," says Steven Green, founder and director of Olive Tree Travel.

"But there is the opportunity to give their hearts and souls a holiday as well, and spend a week or two investing in their own faith. Perhaps this is the time and chance we should be taking with two hands – to go and hear, learn and invest in the cost."

Olive Tree Travel specialises in organising faith-based travel experiences. After a valuable trip to Israel and Jordan in the late 1990s, Green has helped people visit the holy lands and "bring the Scriptures to life" ever since. He and his team co-ordinate tour groups and ensure that people can explore the historical sites of the Bible in a way that grows their faith.

"We get lots of people who are hesitant and don't know if they should or shouldn't," he says. "Those that decide to go always come back thanking us, saying it was the best thing they ever did."

Green is confident that exploring the holy lands and seeing biblical sites has a profound effect on a person spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. "Once you've been on a trip like this, you'll never read your Bible in the same way again," he says. "It gives you a much deeper understanding of and insight into the Scriptures."



SCRIPTURES COME TO LIFE

Bishop Paul Barnett, New Testament scholar and former bishop of Sydney's Northern Region, has lost count of how many tours he and his wife, Anita, have led since 1987. His most recent traced the footsteps of the apostle Paul, helping people to understand the suffering Paul endured in his travels.

"As a long-time learner about the historical and geographical setting of the New Testament, I saw future tours as an opportunity to share this knowledge with others," he says. "I do not see these tours as religious pilgrimages by which pilgrims earn merit. Far from it. Rather, I see the tours as a means of building up and enhancing Bible knowledge."

During each tour Barnett offers commentary on the sites and facilitates prayer and sharing times, which tour members appreciate greatly. "In many ways, the benefits are like a slow-release fertiliser," he says. "Over time, as you go through your photos, things become more and more real."

Adds Margie Forsyth (pictured above with husband Robert): "This is an important thing to do, because it is like going back to your roots." Margie and her husband, Bishop Robert Forsyth (former bishop of the South Sydney Region.), have also led faith-based tours in the Middle East and are planning to lead again in 2019.

She believes that anyone with an interest in biblical history, keen to see where Jesus walked and lived, and wanting an increased understanding of their Christian heritage, would benefit immensely from taking part: "Do it! It's well worth the cost".

The rector of Church Hill, the Rev Justin Moffatt, is also looking forward to guiding a tour of Israel and Jordan at the tail end of GAFCON next year. "This is where I get to say, 'This is Jerusalem' with people who share the same convictions," he says. "These tours are a perfect mix of fun and profound depth and meaning."

At each location, Moffatt leads a time of devotion and prayer, drawing from Scriptures relevant to the setting. "I'm looking forward to standing where our Lord and Saviour stood," he says. "I'm looking forward to reading Scripture at places where the words were first said, where Jesus first said, 'Your sins are forgiven'."

He hopes that the members of his tour will return with a deeper love for Jesus, a fresher way of reading the Bible for themselves, and a real sense that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

Dr Colin Bannerman from Christ Church St Laurence, along with his wife Lyn, have been on two faith-based tours: one through the Middle East, and another tracing Paul's journey through Turkey and Greece.

"I went there out of curiosity," Bannerman says. "But I will never forget celebrating Holy Communion on a boat in Galilee. It was a disparate group of Christians all coming together in the service of Holy Communion."

"There is something about doing it in a place where Jesus would have been, that was familiar to him, and where he taught his disciples – and then there you are, in that place, remembering Christ as you take communion."

When asked if others should consider going, he answers without hesitation, "Go do it! Pick your group, and pick your leader. If you've got the chance to tour even modern Israel and see the span of 6000 years of history since God spoke to Abraham, why would you not?"

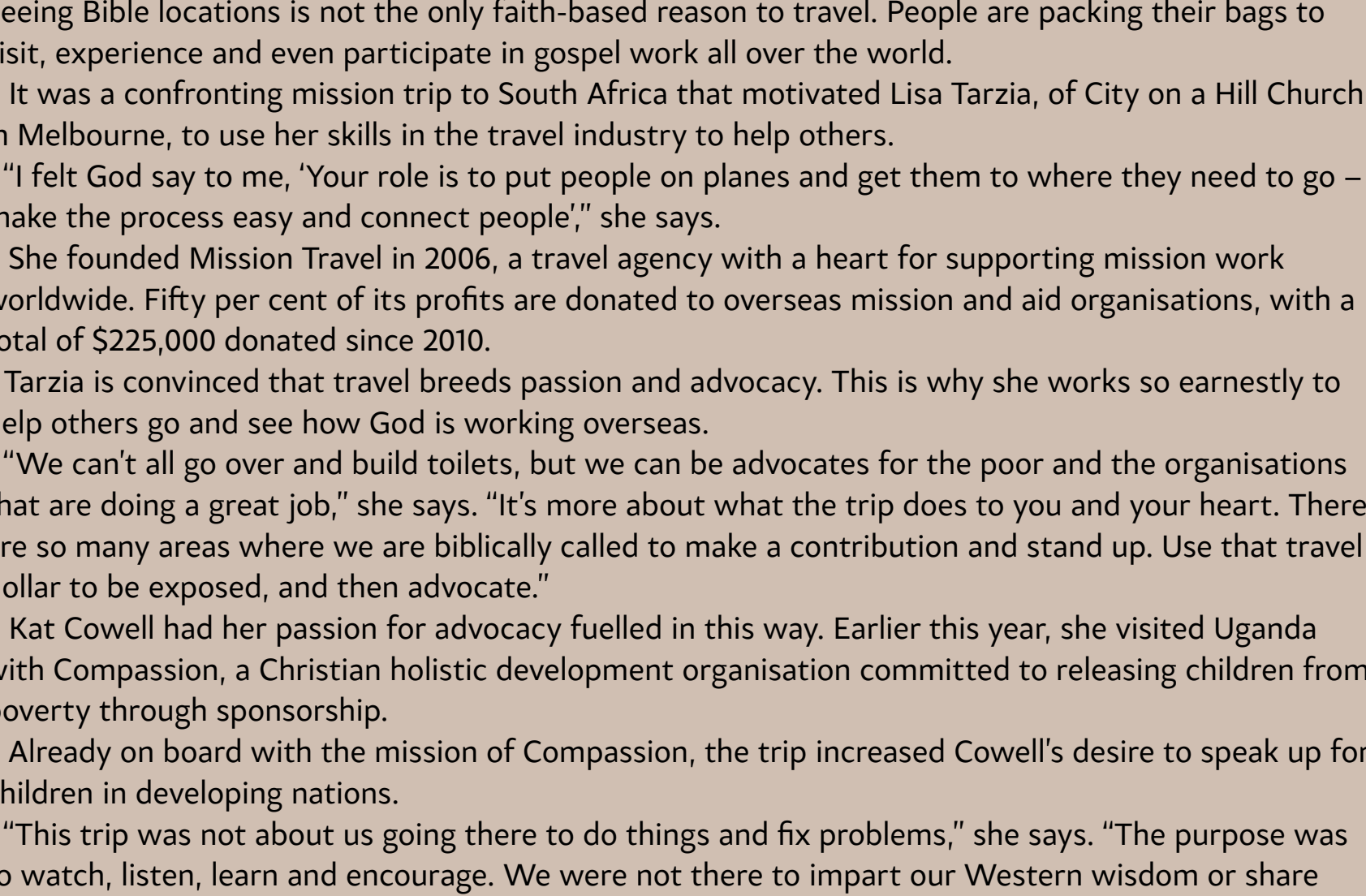
Anh Ton, administrator at St Barnabas' Fairfield, knew the Sydney Missionary and Bible College study tour she joined in 2014 wouldn't be an ordinary holiday. Her faith was challenged in unexpected ways, and she has worked hard since then to use her experiences to bless others – using tales and photos from the trip to make the Bible more tangible for them.

"The responsibility is, now that I've had this opportunity, what will I do to help share this with other people?" she says. "How will I help others to understand the Bible better?"

Although thankful, Ton acknowledges that the decision to go on such a trip needs careful thought. "If you're going to spend thousands of dollars going overseas, why not spend it and go somewhere that is meaningful, that will challenge you about the realness of your faith?" she asks. "There's something about seeing it in the flesh that adds this extra dimension – not that it's necessary for growth, but it is special."

"Part of me still feels a bit selfish because it's not cheap, and then the other half thinks that it was really worthwhile to go and grow. God had given me the opportunity to do it, so why not take a meaningful holiday?"

BIBLE BROUGHT TO LIFE



Touring the Middle East has changed the way Anh Ton reads her Bible.

"You don't need to be there for the Bible to come alive, because we have the Holy Spirit," she says. "But I understand the context, environment and cultural background better now. I have a deeper appreciation of certain parts [of Scripture]."

Physically visiting the places of Scripture, coupled with lectures and devotions at each site, challenged Ton's faith more than she expected.

"We were at the Jordan River and talking about the significance of Jesus' baptism," she recalls. "The preacher pushed this event back onto us. What does it mean for me to be baptised and risen into new life? How do I live life now in light of that? It's not just 'This land is holy' or 'This place is special', it's the significance of what happened here that's so important and that impacts my life."

The mountainous landscape particularly caught Ton's attention, helping her to have a fuller appreciation of simple descriptions in the Bible – such as Jesus going up a mountain to pray.

"It's one line, but it's quite a hike up there!" she says. "We visited the place where Jesus preached the Beatitudes. There are other buildings there and they've sectioned off the area so you can't really get close to it, but you can see the scenery and how steep it is."



Compassion in Uganda: Kat Cowell talks to schoolchildren on her visit to meet Carine, her sponsor child.

GOD AT WORK

Seeing Bible locations is not the only faith-based reason to travel. People are packing their bags to visit, experience and even participate in global work all over the world.

It was a confronting mission trip to South Africa that motivated Lisa Tazaria, of City on a Hill Church in Melbourne, to use her skills in the travel industry to help others.

"I felt God say to me, 'Your role is to put people on planes and get them to where they need to go – make the process easy and connect people,'" she says.

She founded Mission Travel in 2006, a travel agency with a heart for supporting mission work worldwide. Fifty per cent of its profits are donated to overseas mission and aid organisations, with a total of \$225,000 donated since 2010.

Tazaria is convinced that travel breeds passion and advocacy. This is why she works so earnestly to see others go and see how God is working overseas.

"We can't all go over and build toilets, but we can be advocates for the poor and the organisations that are doing a great job," she says. "It's more about what the trip does to you and your heart. There are so many areas where we are biblically called to make a contribution and stand up. Use that travel dollar to be exposed, and then advocate."

Kat Cowell had her passion for Compassion fuelled in this way. Earlier this year, she visited Uganda with Compassion, a Christian holistic development organisation committed to releasing children from poverty through sponsorship.

Already on board with the mission of Compassion, the trip increased Cowell's desire to speak up for children in developing nations.

"This trip was not about us going there to do things and fix problems," she says. "The purpose was to watch, listen, learn and encourage. We were not there to impart our Western wisdom or share solutions but to meet people and hear their stories, to encourage and pray for them, and get a better understanding of how God is transforming the lives of thousands of children through the ministry of sponsorship."

Not only did Cowell see first hand the impact of Compassion's work in Uganda, she had the privilege of meeting her sponsor child of 10 years (see box, below left).

"It's easy to think Compassion sponsorship is a one-way thing: that we send money to them, which gives them increased opportunities in life and exposure to the gospel," she says. "That's true, but there is no denying the impact these children had on our lives, as time and time again we were confronted by their joy, thankfulness and peace in God – who they knew was the One providing for their needs."

WHEN KAT MET CARINE



Kat Cowell (left) with husband Nigel, Carine and project worker Gloria.

Kat Cowell was 16 when she began to sponsor Carine in Uganda. Over the past decade they have exchanged countless letters and photos, so Cowell jumped at the opportunity to travel to Africa and meet her in person.

"As we travelled in the bus towards the venue, I actually started to feel a bit anxious about the visit," she recalls. "What would Carine be like? Would she be excited or nervous? What would we talk about? Would she recognise me?"

There was no need to worry. When she arrived, Cowell immediately spotted Carine in the crowd of children.

"I knew she saw me too, as she gave me a great big smile. That definitely set the tone for the rest of our day together."

"Carine wasn't very talkative but was clearly so happy to meet us, evidenced by the many hugs she gave me throughout the day! The years of letters were nothing like being able to be with each other for those few precious hours. We had a lot of fun playing with some of the gifts we brought Carine – skipping, teaching her to kick an AFL ball, and reading a storybook Bible."

Cowell returned to Sydney believing that what sponsorship would look like for her from now on.

"I have photos of my sponsor kids on my fridge, and I walk past them every day," she says. "But I often forget to pray, I often forget to write. I often don't even think of them. But the kids really do think of their sponsors frequently and are so touched and excited when they receive letters, photos and news. I was challenged to make more of an effort."

Cowell says what she loves most about Compassion is that "it's not just about the money, but the relationship between sponsor and child."

"I was challenged not to take that for granted, to slow down my life back home to be more mindful of my children, and to do my part to pray and encourage them to keep loving God and living for him."

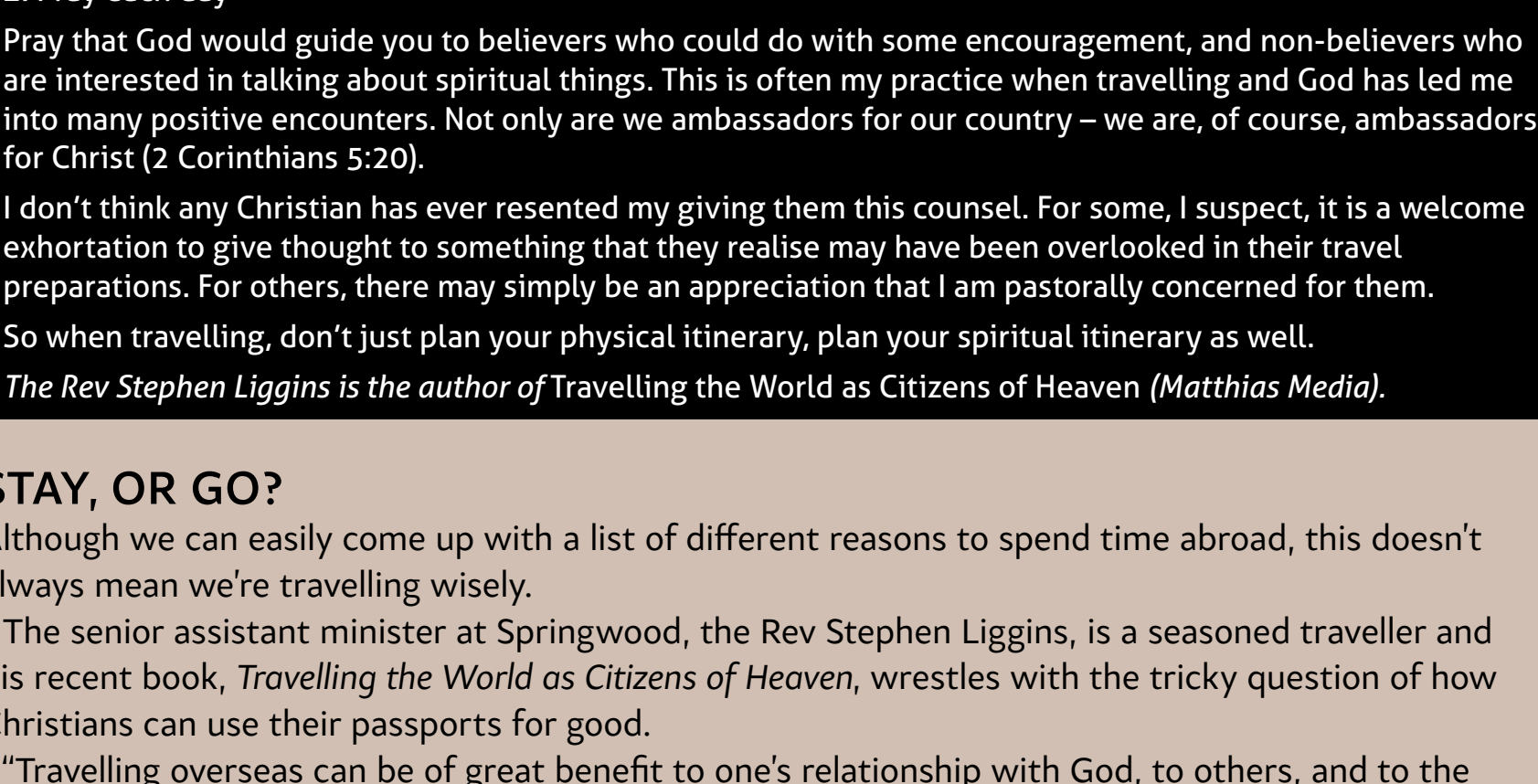


Sand in the Solomons: a student from William Clarke College plays on the beach with local children.

Witnessing the way God works in other countries is also important at William Clarke College in Kellyville, which has sent a group of students and teachers to the Solomon Islands each year since 2008. They meet with locals and non-government organisations, get an understanding of what life is like, what challenges these communities face, and what it looks like to trust God in a radically different environment.

"Visiting the people, schools and communities taught me a lot about each perspective," says Year 11 student Luke Armstrong. "Seeing the dire conditions many faced every day" was difficult to comprehend, however their faith in Christ and the generosity provided to us was inspiring. The Solomon Islands gave the group the opportunity to serve, learn and grow while making a difference to the lives of people we met."

ON THE GROUND IN THE SOLOMONS



It was an early morning last winter when a group of 21 students, four staff and one council member from William Clarke College left Sydney and arrived in Honiara, the Solomon Islands capital, to an "unusually cool" 26 degrees.

Since their first visit almost a decade ago, the school has established strong relationships with many local schools and communities.

The trip involves an introductory phase in the capital, where the group meets with various non-government organisations to learn of the problems the community faces, what they are doing to combat them and what others can do to help.

The students were also able to see a project developed by the islanders using every part of the coconut to produce items they sell across the South Pacific and in Australia. This brings wealth and work opportunities to many villagers.

Students visited early learning centres and led games and activities with children, as well as delivering educational supplies such as stationery and books.

The interactions with locals in the villages and schools have an incredible impact. "I was constantly in awe of how generous the people of the Solomon Islands are, as well as their sense of community," says Year 11 student Alanah Hicks. "I am inspired by their deep faith in God and their golden hearts to serve others."

WATCH FAITH GROW

Fred (name changed for safety reasons) never thought he would travel overseas to teach theology.

He still can't believe he ended up on a two-week trip abroad pastoring in South-East Asia. Fred is one of a number of people who have used their time teaching in a unique way – teaching Bible skills and theology to Christians in a range of countries that don't have access to good theological training.

Many of these travellers prepare before they go to teach material from courses such as Sydney College's Preliminary Theological Certificate (PTC). For Fred, his decision to study a PTC subject quickly became a commitment to teach the material abroad.

"When the group travel agent rang me at work and gave me the quote, I gave her my credit card details, hung up the phone and thought, 'Well, I think I'm going!' he says. "I never decided to go, I just paid and it was decided for me."

God used the people Fred met and taught to challenge and his faith. "The enthusiasm of the pastors to teach the Bible well is very humbling, and it is also infectious," he says. "I used to be quite shy, but when I came back I just wanted to talk to everyone about my faith."

"If you've been in a good church that teaches the Bible faithfully, and you're keen to serve, you should do it. You're teaching them to fish, rather than giving them a fish. We help one person learn the skills and they teach a hundred more in their church."

TRAVEL TIPS FOR CHRISTIANS

BY Stephen Liggins

Seasoned traveller: Stephen Liggins (right) with friends in Nairobi.

have, in 20 years, made a point of speaking with believers before they go travelling overseas. Whether they are a 20-something embarking on a one-month Asian backpacking odyssey, or a retired couple about to cruise the Pacific, my two pieces of advice are the same:

1. Make sure you have quiet times

Aboard, as much as home, we need to consciously spend time each day with God – to remain in him (John 15:5). A daily devotion will help us live well when overseas. Not only will it grow us in our relationship with God, we will also be better placed to avoid temptations and make wiser decisions, more aware of the opportunities to encourage or witness to others that God brings our way, and better able to understand and appreciate the things we encounter in God's incredible yet fallen world. When travelling distant lands, God is our best travel companion and guide.

2. Pray each day

Pray that God would guide you to believers who could do with some encouragement, and non-believers who are interested in talking about spiritual things. This is often my practice when travelling and God has led me into many positive encounters. Not only are we ambassadors for our country – we are, of course, ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

I don't think any Christian has ever resented my giving them this counsel. For some, I suspect, it is a welcome exhortation to give thought to something that they realise may have been overlooked in their travel preparations. For others, there may simply be an appreciation that I am pastorally concerned for them.

So when travelling, don't just plan your physical itinerary, plan your spiritual itinerary as well.

The Rev Stephen Liggins is the author of Travelling the World as Citizens of Heaven (Matthias Media).

STAY, OR GO?

Although we can easily come up with a list of different reasons to spend time abroad, this doesn't always mean we're travelling wisely.

The senior assistant minister at Springwood, the Rev Stephen Liggins, is a seasoned traveller and his recent book, *Travelling the World as Citizens of Heaven*, wrestles with the tricky question of how Christians can use their passports for good.

"Travelling overseas can be of great benefit to one's relationship with God, to others, and to the kingdom of God, but I know of many situations where travel has hindered rather than helped a person's Christian faith," he says. "A Christian may go travelling without giving it much thought. They go abroad simply 'because everyone else is.'"

Liggins believes there can be very good reasons to go overseas, and also good reasons to stay at home. "I would advise someone to prayerfully and biblically consider, and consult with a few wise Christians, on whether the trip is a wise thing to do," he says. "It has many potential benefits... but like all such expeditions abroad it costs money and time and impacts others."

"Having done that, if someone decides to set out overseas I would urge them to maintain quiet times while away, seek to understand the world from a biblical perspective, look for opportunities to encourage believers, seek to be a witness to non-believers, and adopt an expectant attitude."

Good grief

If you want to know a person's true theology speak to them when they are grieving, writes
CHASE KUHN.

DECEMBER 2017

Southern CROSS

11

RECENTLY I HAVE BEEN IN A SEASON OF GRIEF.

A few months ago, my uncle died of cancer. He was my fittest uncle and yet the cancer made him so weak he could not walk. All of this happened between visits home – I left and my uncle was healthy, I returned for his funeral. I watched in that season as my family sought to cope with the loss of a “young” man. Some clung to gospel truth. Others sought “spiritual” help through mediums. Still others sought peace through an understanding of universal cosmic energy, to which they thought my uncle had returned.

More recently I watched my father-in-law die after a long bout with degenerative illnesses. I have seen in that season the real wrestle of a mature Christian man to stand firm in his convictions as the end approached. With him, I have seen his family (*my* family) – even me – process this loss with all sorts of questions. As he died, a man who had ministered for nearly 30 years in a church, how would we make sense of that loss? How should we feel?

Still more recently, I arrived at church on a Sunday morning to hear that one of the teenagers in our congregation – a member of a very keen Christian family – had died the night before. I watched as the congregations across that Sunday tried to deal with this tragedy. Waves of emotion swept over us as we sang “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and “It Is Well”.

We were forced to ask, “Is God truly our *mighty* fortress?” and “Is it *really* well with our souls?” That Sunday was one of the most remarkable occasions at church in my memory. I have never experienced such solidarity with God's people as we grieved sincerely and corporately, and as we clung collectively to the promises extended to us in Christ.

Grief is a humanising experience. While we don't all grieve in the same way, or for the same reasons, we all grieve. We do so because we all lose. In our grief, our mortality is exposed. We are human.

Grief is a fault line. It opens us up. It exposes us. But it doesn't just do this emotionally; it does so theologically. If you want to know a person's true theology, speak to them when they are grieving. There you will discover what they hope in; how they cope; what makes sense of their world.

As a listener to those grieving, I became acutely aware that grief is never something we feel prepared for, but a season for which we must be prepared. That is to say that our convictions matter in that time. Without clarity with regard to what we believe about life and death, in grief we will fill in the gaps with all sorts of non-sense. We need an anchor in the storm. So, I would like to propose a few reflections either in preparation for grief or in consolation for those grieving.

1. DEATH REALLY HURTS DON'T TRIVIALISE OR DENY THE REALITY OF LOSS

Too often we, in denial of the pain of death, act as though it doesn't affect us. I have seen this response in different dress: sometimes it is the outright refusal to face up to the reality that death brings real loss. Other times it is the very “pious” response that everything is better now.

Behind both of these, of course, there may be good intentions and perhaps some good convictions. But they don't actually give appreciation to the real tragedy that death brings. Death is not what should be (I am not denying God's sovereignty here). Death is the consequence of sin. It comes because of the curse brought by human sinfulness. What happens at death, then, is not “natural”, even if it has become normal. That is, it is not what we are meant for – life with God. So, we must recognise that death is a part of the problem with the world. And it hurts.

I love the passage in John's gospel (John 11) where Jesus shows us his emotions over the death of Lazarus. At the tomb of his friend, in the company of a grieving community, Jesus weeps. Jesus weeps even though he could have healed his friend and saved him from death. Jesus weeps even though he will in the next moment raise his friend from the dead.

Why does Jesus weep? I suspect there are two reasons. First, he shows solidarity with the community in grief and expresses his sincere love for a friend lost. He really was gone and it really was painful. Second, Jesus shows us that death is not what is good. It is a painful problem. Of course, the brilliance of this passage is Jesus' demonstration that he is indeed “the resurrection and the life”, and whoever believes in him “though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25 ESV).

2. WE ARE MEANT FOR A BODY DON'T MISUNDERSTAND LIFE AFTER DEATH

When people are uncertain about what happens when someone dies, they tend to make things up according to what sounds best (usually from pop culture): “My baby is an angel now”; “He has gone to become a part of the life force”.

Again, these are all well-intentioned ideas but they don't accurately represent what the Bible tells us about life after death. We may, in fact, become *like* the angels in that we won't be married – but we won't become angels. We never will return to a life force, because we have not come from a cosmic energy, nor do we return to such. God is personal – he is not a “force”. And we aren't a part of God's being, as if we are an extension of his “energy”.

What is promised for us who trust Christ is that we will be with him when we die (2 Cor. 5:1-10, esp. v. 6; cf. Luke 23:43). When Paul reflected on his suffering, he knew that dying in the body meant that he would go to be with the Lord (Phil 1:21-23). This may raise questions for us, such as, what then will we be like?

Here we see a demonstration once more that death is not “natural”, for at death something very unnatural happens. Our soul is divorced from our bodies. This means that spiritually we are with the Lord when we die – we continue to exist really and consciously. But this is not what we are meant to be like. In fact, it isn't what we will always be like. For those who die trusting in Christ, they continue and are with him until the day that Christ comes again and raises the dead (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Then, those believers who have died will take on flesh once more; they will have new, restored, glorious, immortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:35-58).

Our hope for an embodied future is bound up in the reality of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus took on flesh to save us. Jesus rose in the flesh so that we, too, might be raised in the flesh. Jesus remains in the flesh so that we might have an eternity with him in an embodied existence – the existence we were made for by God. But even as we wait for this future resurrection, God keeps us.

3. DEATH IS NOT AN ESCAPE DON'T GIVE DEATH TOO MUCH

When life gets hard, there is a temptation to think that death is the end or an escape. We feel prone to think this way when we watch people in pain; when circumstances are extremely difficult; when relationship breakdowns seem irreconcilable. Death, in these moments, can have a strange allure: release from the pressures or pains of the present. But death is no escape.

Sure, Paul does desire to “depart to be with Christ” (Phil. 1:19-23), but this is not because death is good. And though Paul said this – for his desire for Christ was great! – he continued to entrust himself to Christ for the work of ministry (Phil. 1:24-26).

I cannot say it any better than Michael Horton in his book *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*:

Death is an enemy, not a friend (1 Cor. 15:26), and a terror (Heb 2:15) so horrible that even the one who would triumph over it was overcome with grief, fear and anger at the tomb of his friend Lazarus (John 11:33-36). Jesus did not see death as a benign deliverer, the sunset that is as beautiful as the sunrise, or as a portal to “a better life”...

The reason that believers do not mourn as those who have no hope (1 Th 4:13) is not that they know that death is good, but that they know that God's love and life are more powerful than the jaws of death... Downplaying the seriousness of the foe only trivialises the debt that was paid and the conquest that was achieved at the cross and the empty tomb.

This, of course, is not to snatch any comfort in the death from the one who suffered much. There is relief with Christ (Rev. 21:1-7). But the goodness of being in and with Christ does not take away from the fact that death is an aberration.

4. DEATH IS NOT THE END THERE IS REAL HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE

Our God is a God of salvation, and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death (Psalm 68:20).

Death can seem final. We feel as though we are losing someone forever. But this is not the truth when we consider what the Bible tells us. We have already seen that Jesus declares, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

In many ways, the question that Jesus asked Mary then is the same question he continues to ask us today.

In the face of grief we may find ourselves doubting that Jesus is indeed the resurrection and the life. We may find it hard to believe. But this, again, is where we must cling to our anchor: we remember the promises of the Scriptures. We do not waver from them. We depend upon others to encourage us from texts that keep this message of hope before us.

We recall Hebrews 2:14-15, which declares that Christ came for men and women (not angels) so that “through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”.

With this promise, we remember the great reassurance of Romans 8:38-39 that tells us that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”.

Finally (and once more), we remember the encouraging words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that tell us we should grieve as those with hope, “since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep”.

Christ will come again, and when he does the dead will be raised. It is sure.

Dr Chase Kuhn is director of distance education and lectures in Christian thought and ministry at Moore College.



CELEBRATING THE GREATEST GIFT

Times past, celebrated: St John's, Maroubra rector the Rev Jim Crosweller (right) chats about church and local history with (from left) State MP Michael Daley and Randwick councillors Dylan Parker and Anthony Andrews at the parish's 100th anniversary last month.

Reunions, shared memories and lots of laughter filled the air as St John's, Maroubra celebrated its 100th anniversary on November 5.

The church and its upstairs gallery were packed as members, old friends and invited guests from all three branches of government came together to give thanks for a centenary of service in Jesus' name, and remember times past at the top of the hill overlooking Maroubra Beach.

"It's been fascinating to see the ups and downs of gospel ministry, but how God seemed to provide a band of faithful, gospel-hearted people at every stage," says rector the Rev Jim Crosweller.

"We reflected on Psalm 78:1-8 and how critical it is to pass the gospel along to the next generations – and how that doesn't always happen. The gospel, after all, looks flimsy. It's easy to depart from it for something that looks more solid. Each generation offers one or two things that look more solid. But the gospel is, after all, the power of God. What could give greater permanence?"

After the church service, members past and present gathered in the hall for lunch and the opportunity to tell parish stories, look at old photos, church records and a range of information on the area provided by the Randwick Historical Society.

A special way the church has chosen to mark its centenary is by looking outward, marking the 100 years with 100 gifts.

Members have dreamed up ideas for presents large and small, and will be giving them out until later this month – whether it be cake for a neighbour, free coffee for the person behind them in the café queue, practical gifts for a local school, hospital or business, or books and DVDs for the library.

"100 Gifts was a great idea from a member who had been through a centenary elsewhere," Mr Crosweller says.

"Given that we are celebrating what God has given us through Jesus over this 100 years, why not celebrate it by being a giving people to our community? Giving gifts that are not expected is still counter-cultural and a great conversation starter.

"It's not hard to talk about how thankful we feel in what God has given us in Jesus as you give something to someone else."

50 UP at Mt DRUITT

St **JAMES'**, Mount Druitt marked 50 years of serving its local community with a weekend of celebrations at the end of October.

The congregation, local MPs and past church members met for a range of events to rejoice in the work the parish has done in the area. Many locals suffer from a range of disadvantages and are supported by the church's free food hampers, community dinners, op shop and Anglicare groups.

Rector the Rev Warren Smith says the theme for the weekend was passing the gospel on to the next generation.

"It's a concern for our children's ministry to reach children and families, to make sure we have younger people coming through to pass on the gospel – and also to see people raised up in godly leadership," he says.

The area has also changed enormously over the past 50 years.

"When the church opened the average age in the area was about 12," he says. "The public schools were packed – 2000 children in the local public schools! And while there are still a lot of children here... it's also an older area now as well.

"But there are also a large number of islander people here now, a big group of Filipinos, plus Aboriginal people and also quite a significant number of Muslims."

Mr Smith is grateful for the hard work so many church members did to help celebrate the anniversary, and, over the parish's life, is also thankful for their faith and "growth in understanding and service".



Smile! The Bishop of the Western Region, the Rt Rev Ivan Lee, cuts the 50th anniversary cake at Mt Druitt's celebrations alongside St James' parish wardens Joe Mall and Fay Forbes.

Heralded from the heavens

JUDY ADAMSON

The Star
Rated G

IT WOULDN'T BE DECEMBER WITHOUT CUTE TALKING ANIMALS IN A NEW ANIMATED release – not to mention at least one film per season with a Christmas theme.

This year you get both at once, in what the makers of *The Star* pointedly refer to as the “greatest story ever told”: the birth of Jesus.

So, there's cause to rejoice. We have a movie that takes the central story of the Bible and, if you put the talking animals to one side, tells it pretty straight.

Mary is visited by an angel and responds with faith. She tells Joseph and yes, he's confused – then he is visited by an angel and also responds with faith. They pray; they can't see the way forward but step out, knowing that God has chosen them and trusting in his strength and his goodness. Wise men follow the star and Herod schemes to kill the new king of which they speak. The child is born and angels appear in the heavens, announcing the good news of his birth to the shepherds. Zechariah and Elizabeth also make a brief appearance with an infant John.

It's hardly a spoiler to relate all this, given that it's in the gospels! The point is that the central truths of our faith – including that Jesus is the Messiah (and is called so in the movie) – are all in *The Star*. So, should we care that there are talking animals in a film retelling the events around Jesus' birth? Presenting the nativity from the animals' perspective has been done numerous times over the years in song and story, and even Balaam's ass in the Old Testament shows that God can give a voice to the creatures of the field if he so desires.

But, of course, *The Star* doesn't relate the gospels word for word. We get the animals' stories, too, and the usual banter and sass that goes along with that.

The central character is Bo (short for Boaz) the donkey. He's tied to a mill wheel grinding grain but dreams of a meaningful life, which he thinks he will find by joining the travelling “royal caravan”. His best friend, Dave the dove, is up for adventure as soon as his friend can be free, but when Bo finally does break out of the mill house he is injured, and hides from the miller in Mary and Joseph's courtyard.

Mary adopts and cares for him, but after she and Joseph leave for Bethlehem, Bo is horrified when Herod's “hunter” arrives (with his dogs) and he unwittingly focuses their attention on Mary. He determines to follow her himself to warn her.

Different threads of the story follow Bo's adventures, the hunter's chase, and the wise men and their chatty camels as they seek the king heralded by the star. And yes, in the stable in Bethlehem there are even more talking (and singing) creatures. Not to mention a prayer to God from a donkey.

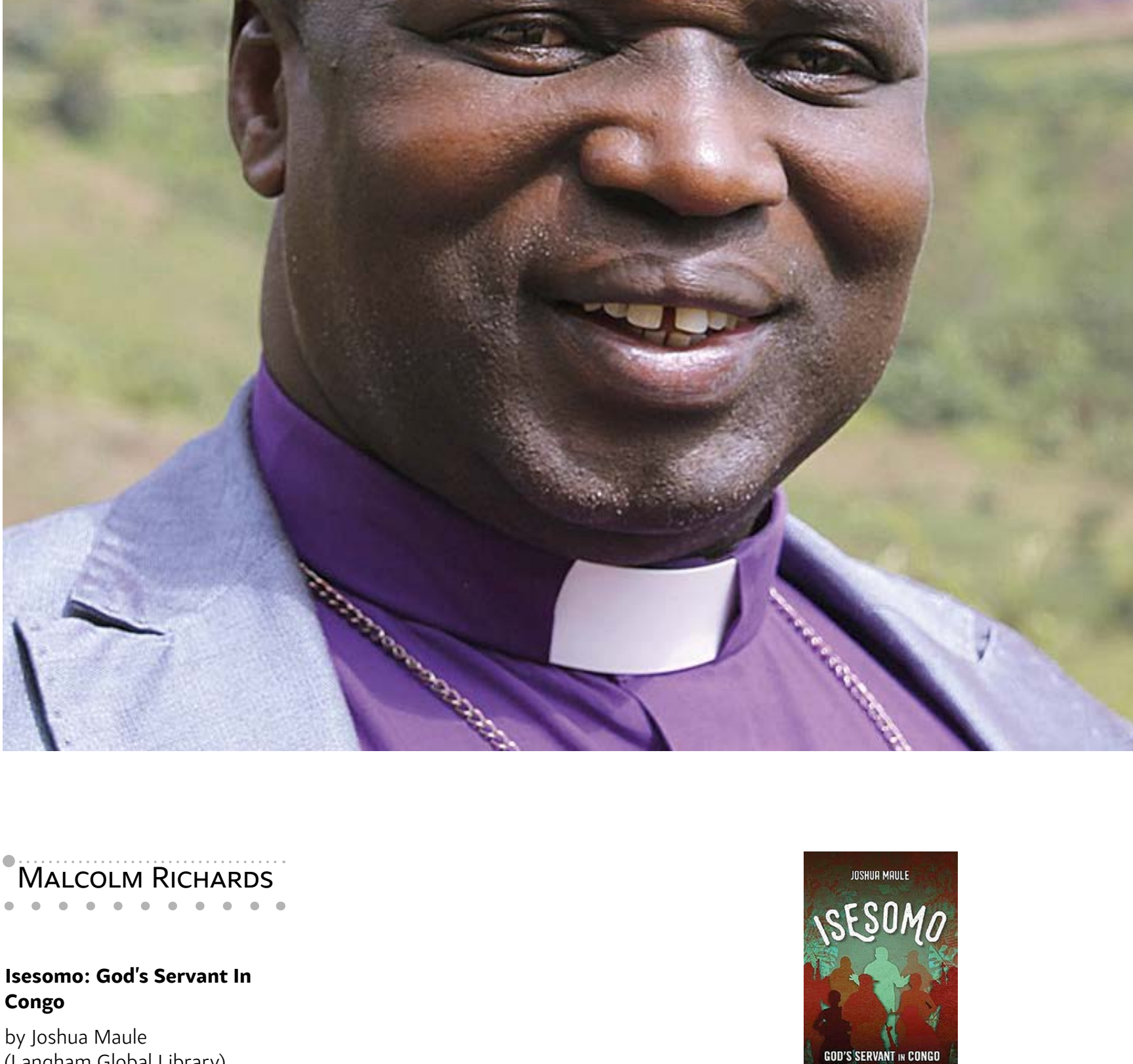
Some people may have a problem with all this. *The Star* is very much a kids' film, and while it's one thing to have singing and talking animals in an invented story, will this confuse children about what's real and what isn't – especially if they have no knowledge of the real events surrounding Jesus' birth? On the other hand, if the movie did retell the story completely straight, as in *The Nativity Story*, would the same unchurched parents even take their kids to see it these days?

Personally I found the film approachable and fun, with the central truths of the first Christmas and who Jesus is firmly set in place. Weaving well-known carols sung by the likes of the Pentatonix and Casting Crowns into the story adds to this, because it provides another link for friends and family who aren't Christian – as well as, potentially, greater understanding of what the carols and the story are actually about.

The Star is a bit twee in places (mainly the moments when Oprah Winfrey's camel Deborah is declaiming about one thing or another), and a couple of times the music is intrusive, but in the end everything the little donkey, dancing dove, cheery sheep and streetwise camels do and say brings them to the manger on that first Christmas night. That is the point, for them and for us.

Invite your non-Christian friends and their kids to see it and talk to them afterwards about the carols and what they say, the gospel and what it says, and the Messiah whose arrival was heralded from the heavens – and whose birth changed everything.

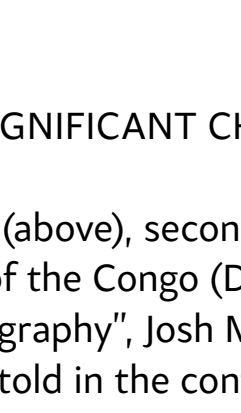
Congo churchman



MALCOLM RICHARDS

Iseomo: God's Servant In Congo

by Joshua Maule
(Langham Global Library)



WANT TO THANK JOSH MAULE FOR INTRODUCING US TO A SIGNIFICANT CHURCH LEADER from a country that most people wouldn't visit on their holidays.

In this short book we are introduced to Bishop Adolphe Iseomo (above), second bishop in the Diocese of North Kivu in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). While the book is essentially a biography in the style of a “missionary biography”, Josh Maule neatly intertwines three different but interrelated histories. Iseomo's story is told in the context of the development of the Anglican Church of Congo, especially the Diocese of North Kivu, but also the sad account of the country that was Zaire and is now the DRC.

The history of the DRC is tragic, with more than its fair share of war and genocide. As Maule tells Iseomo's story he connects us with this history – from the late 1800s when Congo was the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium, through to the catastrophe in Congo following the Rwandan genocide of the late 1990s when more than 4 million people lost their lives, and finally to the current situation where armed groups range over eastern parts of the country.

As well as explaining this history Maule serves readers well by pointing us to various must-read books on Congo that can be followed up by those who get hooked. He shows us that the history of the DRC is also very relevant to Iseomo's story. It not only shapes him as a person but also his growth as a minister of the gospel.

The development of the Anglican Church of Congo also shapes Iseomo's life and ministry. The book explains this in fairly stark terms, frequently detailing the shortcomings of the church itself and also various church leaders Iseomo must deal with as he promotes Christ and the biblical gospel.

The reader should be aware that Maule, in condemning certain events and leaders and labelling some as “not converted” – or painting them in a very bad light – is relying mainly on a restricted number of sources and that these leaders have had no right of reply.

Nevertheless the story of the Anglican Church of Congo is an important one and well told.

Maule relays to us the story of Iseomo's life in a warts-and-all manner. There are not many church leaders in Australia who would allow their biographer to include information from their pre-Christian days, including details of sexual conquests and drunken revelries. Good on Iseomo for his honesty and bravery!

From such beginnings we hear of his conversion and the subsequent way Christ gripped his life, giving him an unending passion to preach the gospel of Jesus and see others receive this gift of salvation. Maule does well to allow the reader to see the development of this godly man and very talented evangelist – taking us along on a remarkable journey as Iseomo is pushed by God into taking on more and more responsible positions in the church, and constantly taking huge risks so the most needy can hear the gospel.

This is a book worth reading. Bishop Iseomo has had an impact on many lives in Congo but also around the world, including here in Australia. Josh Maule is quite obviously one of them. If nothing else this book should prompt you to pray for Congo and Christian ministry in that most difficult of countries. You might pray, too, that God continues to use Iseomo and raises up others like him.

The Rev Malcolm Richards is general secretary of CMS NSW & ACT and a former missionary in the DRC.

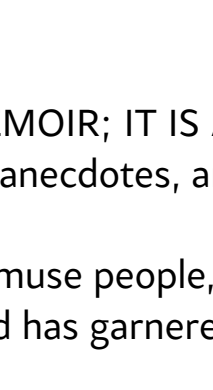
Classic Chappo



DAVID HEWETSON

The Chappo Collection

by David Mansfield
(published by Anglican Aid)



HIS BOOK IS WELL TITLED. IT IS NOT A BIOGRAPHY OR MEMOIR; IT IS A “COLLECTION”. Colourful characters like John Charles Chapman always collect anecdotes, and often engender some themselves.

Chapman (above) skilfully made his stories work for him to amuse people, get past their prejudices and win them to Christ. In this book David Mansfield has garnered a large and revealing range of such things.

Chappo collected friends, and a large part of the “collection” is things they said about him. One friend observed that he had the gift of making you feel unique, so you felt that you were his best friend. In addition, although Chappo remained single he had a high view of marriage; there is a big section on him as godfather and the book also contains his excellent sermon on singleness.

Glenn Lyons asks what it was that made Chappo such an effective evangelist and concludes that it was a “normality” that made him endearingly “ordinary”. This common touch gave him the ability to identify with all sorts of people and approach them with refreshingly plain language.

His friend Dick Lucas – with a certain amount of English reserve – was amazed at John's ability to initiate conversations with people even on public transport.

Chappo will, of course, be mostly remembered as an evangelistic preacher. David Seccombe says, “I regard John as one of the finest evangelists in the world – very different from Billy Graham or the American evangelists – very much an Australian, warm, humorous, down to earth and crystal clear”.

A dominating aspect of his evangelistic messages was that they were expository. When John Stott came to CMS Summer School and gave a fine model of this style of biblical preaching Chappo and others saw it as the way forward. Chappo thereafter used it in his evangelistic preaching and, as Philip Jensen says, “Chappo was an expositor in an Australian way”.

As a gifted preacher Chappo also became a teacher of preachers. His mantras on the length of sermons, shortness of introduction and failure to disclose what a sermon lacks the audience was legendary; many a budding preacher had the “blowtorch applied to the belly” when overstepping these markers. Moore College and Sydney Missionary and Bible College both had the good sense to employ Chappo as a homiletics teacher.

Some people would first have met Chapman in his books. *What is a Christian* reached a circulation of 250,000 within 10 years and has since been translated into a number of languages. In the '80s more books followed such as *Know and Tell the Gospel* and *A Fresh Start*. Eventually Matthias Media took over the publication of Chappo's books, including some written in his last years.

No. 111 in the collection is titled “Chappo and the World”, and takes us from his early years to wider and wider opportunities such as England and South Africa. Many may have wondered whether Chappo's home-grown, dinkum Aussie approach to proclaiming the gospel was exportable. How would it go in more reserved circles unused to the sometimes riotous humour and hilarious anecdotes?

His friendship with Dick Lucas of St Helen's, Bishopsgate in London eventually put this question to the test almost annually. “John's visits over here became legendary,” Lucas says.

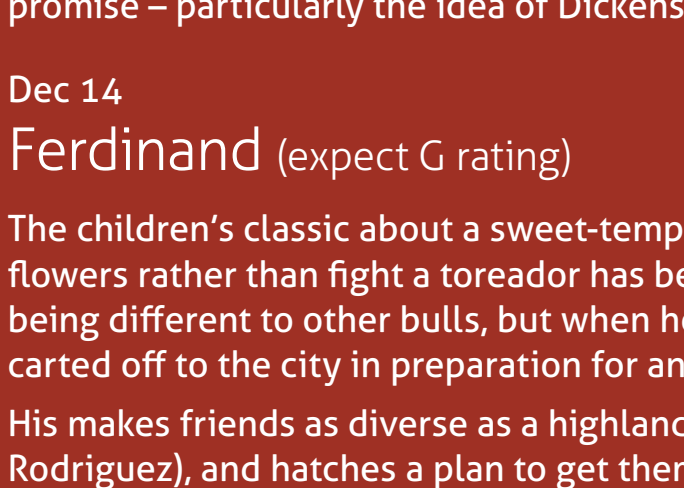
This book was a challenge to the reviewer. The scope is so large and the quotes so amusing, touching and revealing that the reviewer could only pick and choose. It is left to the fortunate reader to have the time to give the book its proper treatment.

David Mansfield is to be congratulated for opening up highlights from the life of a very remarkable man.

Holiday films

In cinemas now:

The Man Who Invented Christmas (PG)



Charles Dickens (Dan Stevens) deals with writer's block, disinterested publishers and characters with a will of their own as he creates his best-known work: *A Christmas Carol*. Also starring Christopher Plummer as Scrooge, and supported by a host of notable British character actors including Jonathan Pryce, Simon Callow and Miriam Margolyes, we take Dickens' journey of discovery with him as his imagination brings his characters to life.

A great premise and a great cast, but it was unseen prior to release so we shall see if it lives up to its promise – particularly the idea of Dickens “inventing” Christmas!

Dec 14

Ferdinand (expect G rating)

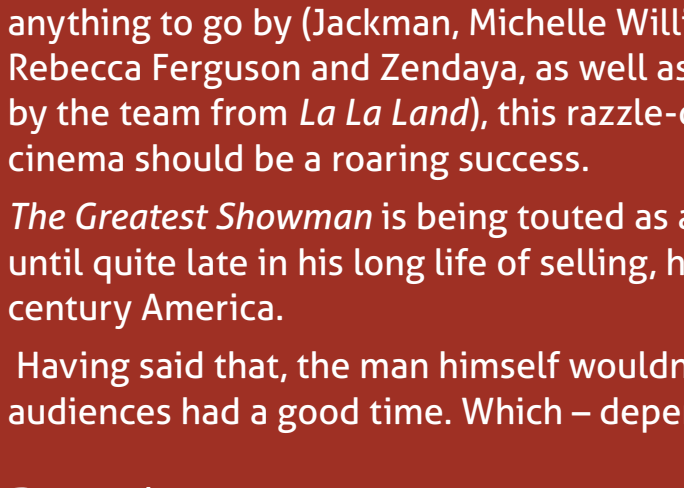
The children's classic about a sweet-tempered bull who wants to live in the country and smell the flowers rather than fight a Toreador has become a jolly holiday film. Ferdinand (John Cena) is happy being different to other bulls, but when he's stung by a bee he's mistaken for a fierce creature and carted off to the city in preparation for an upcoming bullfight.

His makes friends as diverse as a highland bull (David Tennant) and a purple hedgehog (Gina Rodriguez), and hatches a plan to get them all out of captivity and back to his home.

It's cute, family-friendly fare from the makers of *Ice Age*, so is bound to be popular.

Dec 26

Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle (PG)



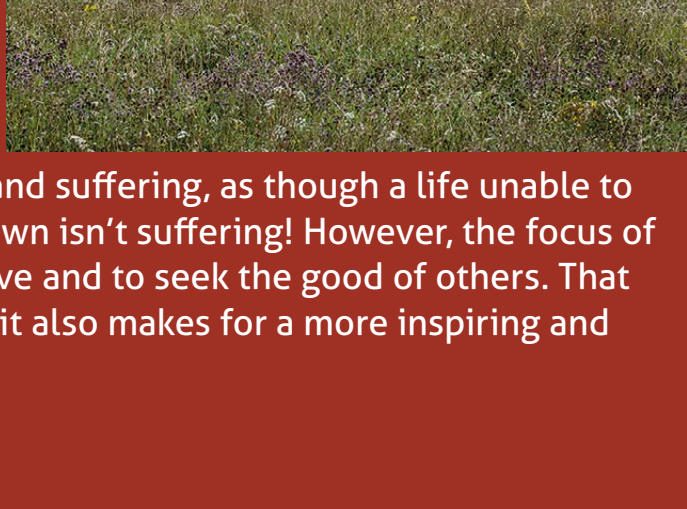
My first thought on seeing this film was to be remade was, “Why?” The original *Jumanji*, starring Robin Williams, was a huge hit in 1995 and a brilliantly inventive piece of cinema. How could you top that?

Happily, the makers aren't trying to. Instead, the deviant game has morphed itself into a video format, with avatars, in the 20-odd years since the events of the first film, which creates tremendous opportunities for fun as well as freedom for the story.

So, this time a bunch of teens stuck in detention get sucked into the game, which is when their “avatars” – Dwayne Johnson, Karen Gillan, Jack Black and Kevin Hart – take over. It's one heck of an adventure, and may well be the hit of the summer.

The Greatest Showman (expect PG/M)

Hugh Jackman has a star turn in this long-awaited musical about the life of P.T. Barnum and the creation of his famous circus. Apparently it's taken seven or eight years to get this to the screen because studios originally weren't keen to back a musical, but if star power is anything to go by (Jackman, Michelle Williams, Zac Efron, Rebecca Ferguson and Zendaya, as well as songs written by the team from *La La Land*), this razzle-dazzle piece of cinema should be a roaring success.

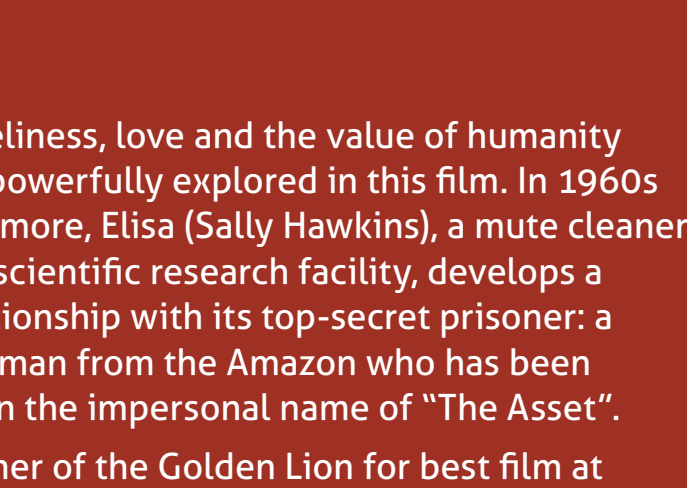


The Greatest Showman is being touted as a biopic, although the real P.T. Barnum didn't get into circuses until quite late in his long life of selling, hoaxing and presenting the spectacular and weird to 19th century America.

Having said that, the man himself wouldn't have cared a fig about historical accuracy as long as audiences had a good time. Which – depending on your enthusiasm for the songs – you probably will.

Breathe (M)

A stunning performance from Andrew Garfield in this extraordinary true story about Robin Cavendish, who contracted polio on a trip to Africa in the late 1950s and was paralysed from the neck down.



Cavendish's new wife Diana (Claire Foy), refuses to give up on him or see him condemned to life in a hospital bed, and the film follows the couple's determination to see Cavendish live as normal as life as possible, and then seek the same for other polio sufferers.

Some critics have wanted more to be made of his struggles and suffering, as though a life unable to touch your son or wife, move your body or breathe on your own isn't suffering! However, the focus of the story is more on the couple's capacity to overcome, to love and to seek the good of others. That may be partly because their son is one of the producers, but it also makes for a more inspiring and affecting finished product. Go with tissues.

January 4

All the Money in the World (M15+/M)

Based on the true story of the kidnapping of John Paul Getty III in the 1970s, this film looked certain to tank at the box office after serious allegations of sexual misconduct came to light against actor Kevin Spacey.

He played the small but pivotal role of stingy multi-billionaire J. Paul Getty, who refuses to stump up the huge ransom demanded for his grandson's release, to the despair of the boy's mother (Michelle Williams).

Given the Spacey scandal, director Ridley Scott decided to refilm J. Paul Getty's scenes with Christopher Plummer in the role, at a reputed total cost of \$10 million. Time will tell if this pays off in terms of box office, although nothing will change the horrific truth of lives traumatised by violence and the tragic effects of greed.

Jan 25

The Shape of Water (expect M/M15+)

Loneliness, love and the value of humanity are powerfully explored in this film. In 1960s Baltimore, Elisa (Sally Hawkins), a mute cleaner at a scientific research facility, develops a relationship with its top-secret prisoner: a fish-man from the Amazon who has been given the impersonal name of “The Asset”.

Winner of the Golden Lion for best film at the Venice Film Festival in September, *The Shape of Water* is a combination of drama, fantasy and romance, challenging viewers to consider the value in difference and the power of acceptance. It's beautifully shot and sensitively directed by Guillermo del Toro, and is already garnering Oscar buzz for Hawkins.

Viewers' notice is drawn to the fact that a Bible-inspired film (*The Story of Ruth*) is playing at Elisa's local cinema, giving a strong hint to del Toro's mind about the capacity of love to overcome all boundaries. The challenge is humanistic, not faith-based, but it's fascinating.