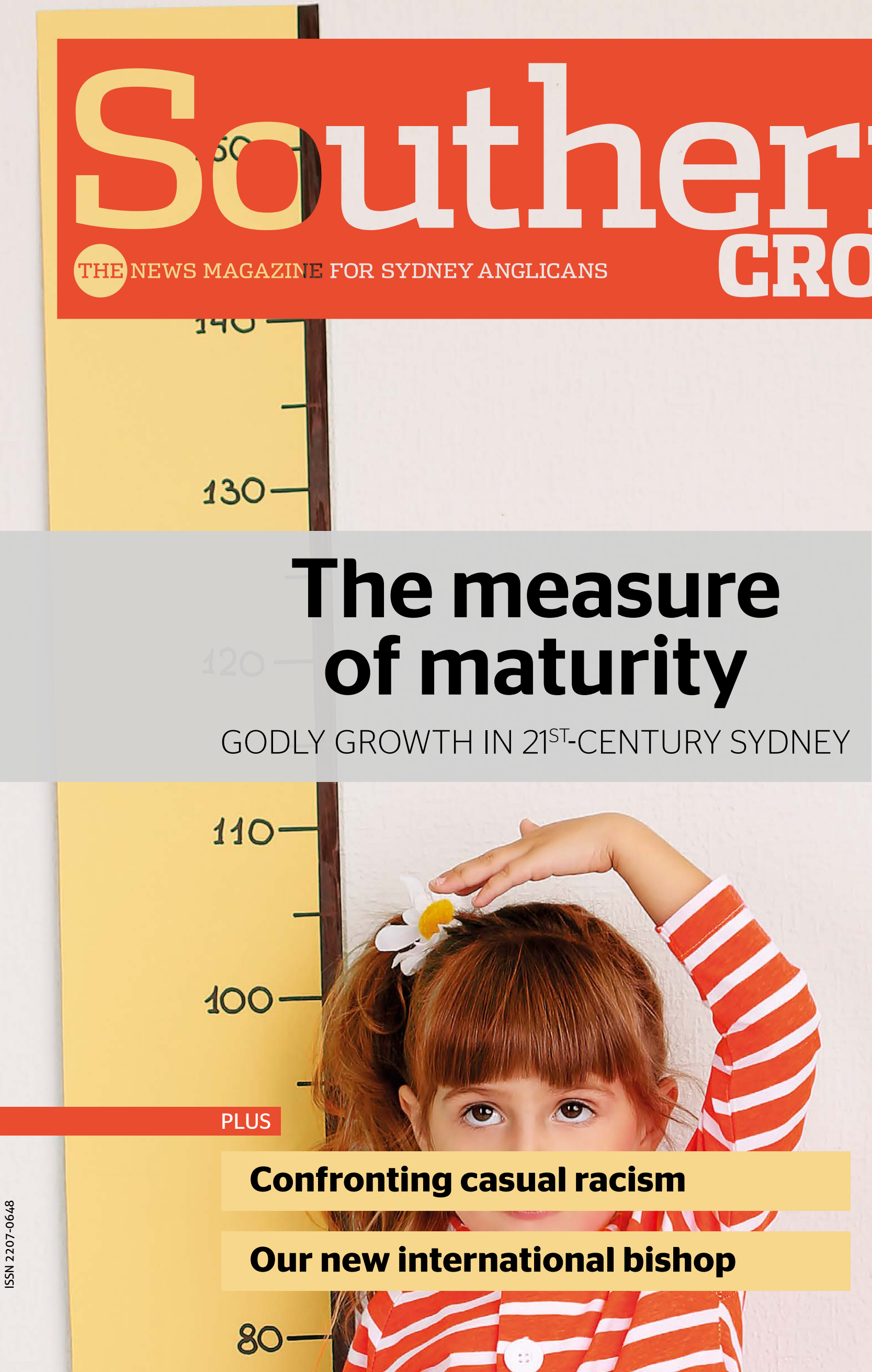
Southern CROSS
THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS
AUGUST 2019

The measure of maturity

GODLY GROWTH IN 21ST-CENTURY SYDNEY



PLUS

Confronting casual racism

Our new international bishop

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"the phone app ...can prompt an explanation of the gospel"

Bishop Peter Lin
Sydney News

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God has a message for Georges River

The world at our doorstep: a street scene at Lakemba during Ramadan. PHOTO: Matt Dodd

THE GEORGES RIVER REGION IS THE AREA OF THE SYDNEY DIOCESE THAT HAS CHANGED THE most in the past 50 years. Once a bastion of Anglo Australia, the area is now a thriving multicultural centre.

This presents challenges and opportunities as the region gears up for a year of mission in 2020. Prayer, training and even a smartphone app are being pressed into service.

The area is centred around the course of the Georges River through southwestern Sydney and includes suburbs such as Liverpool, Revesby, Earlwood and Lakemba.

"Where once the area was perhaps dominated by Anglicans and Catholics, there is now a high percentage of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists," says the Bishop of Georges River, Peter Lin, who has announced training seminars as one of the lead-up events to the mission.

"Many people have neighbours that are of those three faith backgrounds and we are often not well aware of how people of different faiths, and different cultures, really may think differently about life and about God," he says.

"It's helpful to know more about where others are coming from in order to most effectively share Jesus with them. Because in the end, we don't want to just share Jesus, we want to share Jesus effectively."

It is that clear communication that is driving much of the preparation for mission, from prayer points throughout the region – which has churches praying for other suburbs each month – to the theme adopted by the five mission areas.

"It was suggested that we use John 3:16," Bishop Lin says. "There was consensus around this and people were enthusiastic because, basically, if you know John 3:16 then it is very, very easy to share the gospel."

Seminars are being run in the region to help people reach Muslim or Hindu neighbours, and a session on Buddhism is planned early next year. A smartphone app has also been developed with a gospel outline based on John 3:16. Bishop Lin will launch the app at the Georges River Regional Conference this month.

"You don't have to remember six boxes and six different Bible verses – you just remember one Bible verse," he says. "With the phone app there's a picture that can prompt an explanation of the gospel and what it means to trust Jesus."

The aim is for every parishioner in the region to memorise John 3:16 and pray for the opportunity to share it at least once in 2020.

"God willing, they'll get opportunities more than once," Bishop Lin says. "But we are saying learn it and share it. That would be a great achievement to share the words of life with somebody else."

Read about the Ramadan Peace Tent on page 11.

Seminar details

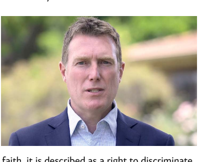
- Reaching our Muslim neighbours: Saturday, August 31 at Christ Church, Mortdale
- Reaching our Hindu neighbours: Saturday, September 21 at Liverpool South

Laws should enshrine "positive right" to faith

More is needed than a minimalist approach to religious freedom: Federal Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells.

DRAFT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM LAWS ARE LIKELY TO BE MADE PUBLIC THIS MONTH AMID AN unprecedented debate in Australia over the nature of freedom of speech, conscience and belief.

The debate has been spurred along by the sacking of rugby player Israel Folau for posting a Christian message on Instagram. But the debate also comes as an international report shows that government restrictions on religion have increased around the world – not only under authoritarian countries but also in democracies, most notably in Europe.



Federal Attorney-General Christian Porter (right) has begun briefings for MPs, religious leaders and community groups over the proposed form of the Federal legislation, in response to last year's Ruddock Report on Religious Freedom.

The Government says it has made the issue a priority and has been conducting a round of workshops to test the "workability" of the bill, according to Mr Porter.

Bishop Michael Stead, the chairman of the Sydney Diocese Religious Freedom Reference Committee, says, "The issue that has dogged the public debate is that when religious organisations want to practise their faith, it is described as a right to discriminate.

"We don't want the right to discriminate against anybody. We want the right to manifest our belief in public and for that not to be caught up in anti-discrimination law. It's about understanding religious freedom as a positive right."

Liberal Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells has circulated a parliamentary petition saying that "freedom to manifest one's religion" should be limited only by the need to protect public safety, health or the rights and freedoms of others. She joined religious leaders in saying the Government needs to do more than take a minimalist approach to the issue of religious freedom.

Bishop Stead also called for the laws to protect religious bodies, as well as individuals, to manifest their beliefs by hiring those who adhere to their faith. Amid debate on the draft bill, the sacking of Israel Folau has played out in the media for at least two months.

After a website refused to allow Folau to fundraise for a legal defence (and the Australian Christian Lobby opened a fund which raised $2 million in just two days), Archbishop Davies observed that "Israel Folau's right to express his faith and act according to his conscience is of fundamental importance in any democracy, and it is of great concern to many Australians that this right is being denied and vilified.

"Many commentators, and many politicians, have failed to understand the precious nature of conscience and belief and its power in the lives of ordinary Australians. Loud, intolerant voices swamp the quiet faith of many."

The case has been cast as merely a contract dispute but Bishop Stead says it is unclear whether Mr Folau's contract included a social media ban.

"The deeper concern is whether his employer has the right to require a code of conduct on issues which have nothing to do with playing rugby, especially when it restricts freedom to express religious belief."

Last month, the Pew Research group released its 10th annual report on Global Restrictions on Religion, which showed government restrictions and social hostility had risen across the world. Pew found that in Europe there has been a bigger increase in government limits on religious activities – such as restrictions on religious dress, public or private worship or religious literature – than in any other region.

New bishop to "Go with God's plan"

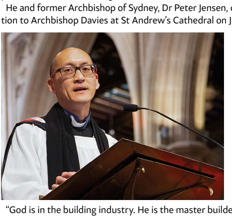
Bishop Malcolm Richards is congratulated after the service by Bishop Peter Lin and Archbishop Davies.

CANON MALCOLM RICHARDS HAS BEEN MADE THE NEW BISHOP FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS in a groundbreaking consecration in Sydney last month.

Bishop Richards, who was previously General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society NSW & ACT and a missionary to the Congo, is the first to take on the role without also having responsibilities as a regional bishop. He will, however, take up a parallel appointment as the director of the Centre for Global Mission at Moore College.

The former Bishop of Georges River, Peter Tasker, pioneered the role of Bishop for International Relations in 2009, representing the Archbishop and the Diocese at consecrations and conferences, and making pastoral visits across the globe.

He and former Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Peter Jensen, officially presented Canon Richards for consecration to Archbishop Davies at St Andrew's Cathedral on July 6. All the bishops present – who included the former Archbishop of Melbourne, Peter Watson, as well as the Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn, Mark Short – then laid hands on the new bishop to pray for his ministry.



"What a mighty work: what a great responsibility. No wonder we should pray for you today," said the Rev Dr Jonathan Wei-Han Kuan (left), the director of CMS in Victoria, to Bishop Richards in his sermon.

"Jesus is in the business of making peace between all cultures and between cultures and God through his atoning death on the cross," he said, reflecting the multicultural nature of the new bishop's role.

"God is in the building industry. He is the master builder, busily building his church... a building made up of bricks of every language and culture and nation. God's plan is international and intercultural in scope. Go with God's plan – what God is already doing: making peace among the nations."

The international flavour continued for the last hymn, where the congregation was invited to sing "To God be the Glory" in Swahili or any other language.

Service, compassion and "Operation Cruise Terminal"

Upheld – with joy – by the Lord: the Rev Un Tay at the Mission to Seafarers centre in Millers Point.

TO SAY THAT THE REV UN HUI TAY IS BRIMMING OVER WITH THE JOY OF THE LORD WOULD BE a huge understatement. He always has a story or three, laughs almost more than he talks and looks a decade younger than his 59 years. All God's doing, he assures me.

Mr Tay – or Pastor Tay to the sailors he serves – brings this exuberant faith, and 40 years as a church planter, to his work as head of the Mission to Seafarers. He is excited about what the mission can offer the mainly Asian crew of international freight vessels, who have to live away from their loved ones in order to provide for them.

"The life of a seafarer is very tough," he says. "They sacrifice the comfort of home... spend nine to 12 months at sea and have to deal with isolation, loneliness, depression, mental health issues.

"The suicide rate for seafarers is much higher than the general population. If you have relationship problems, you have nowhere to turn. If you have problems at work, you can't go home like the rest of us do. There's no escape.

"When they arrive at the port we have a chaplain go on board to visit them. We provide pastoral care, counselling – we are there for them, a pair of listening ears that they can confide in, whatever the issues are. They look forward to seeing us."

Because of the mission's desire to be a welcoming, compassionate ministry, its centre at Millers Point is crammed with whatever a travelling sailor might need: games, comfy couches, free wifi, cheap local SIM cards, Western Union money transfers, toiletries, international snacks – even souvenirs at cheaper prices than the shops outside.

But more than anything else, Mr Tay wants those who visit to hear and respond to the gospel.

"Because of the standard sea routes we see them once every 35-42 days," he says. "Our bus goes and picks them up [from places such as Port Botany]... and whenever they're not talking to family or whatever, there's time for our staff here to interact and talk to them.

"From time to time I'll call some of them to my office, where I'll chat to them and ask them about their faith. I will ask them whether they have personally committed their lives to Jesus and, if they have not, I share the gospel with them. If they want to make that commitment afterwards, I guide them through a prayer of commitment... and every time they come back to Sydney, we can continue those conversations and follow them up."

Opportunities to serve

As exciting as this ministry is, there are even more opportunities on the horizon – what Mr Tay refers to as "Operation Cruise Terminal".

In recent years the Mission to Seafarers has gradually been given greater access to crews on cruise ships, which visit Sydney almost daily between October and April. While there might be 26 crew on a container vessel, there can be up to 1200 on one cruise ship.

"If you got 10 per cent or even 5 per cent of these crews visiting us, we'd be like a madhouse!" Mr Tay says with a laugh. And you know there's nothing he'd rather see happen. But the mission has, at this stage, only a handful of volunteers in addition to its four staff chaplains, so during the cruise season they need more willing hands to welcome crew at the Overseas Passenger Terminal as well as, for the first time this year, the terminal at White Bay.

The reason for their presence is that most staff on cruise ships have never heard of the Mission to Seafarers and aren't aware of its support services for life or faith. For the five years to 2017, Mr Tay says, barely 10 cruise crew members visited the centre each season. Last year, after the MTS reached out in person at the terminal, there were 250 visitors. This year he hopes to double that. "Can you imagine?" he asks, smiling broadly.

He hopes to create a roster of people who can give up an occasional morning to welcome newly arrived crews to Sydney, explain what the Mission to Seafarers is about and be ready to share the gospel if the opportunity arises.

"Our mission here is a good training ground for those who want to go for short-term missions overseas," Mr Tay adds. "The crews come from all over the world so people could start here, learn how to understand the mindset and a bit of a different culture and see how comfortable they are with that before they go.

"We need extra hands and feet to help us with Operation Cruise Terminal, and we trust in God by faith. He will uphold us."

Those interested in Operation Cruise Terminal, or having Mr Tay come and speak about the Mission to Seafarers at their church, can call 02 9241 3009 or visit www.mts.org.au/sydney

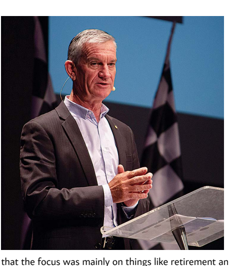
The work of Mission to Seafarers in Sydney is being recognised nationally and internationally, with the centre – and Un Tay himself – in line for major awards.

Not only did Sydney win best seafarers centre in Australia in 2017 and 2018, but this year it has been nominated as Best Seafarers Centre in the world. It is now on a short list of six for that award, which will be announced next month by the International Seafarers Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN), based in the UK.

The ever-cheerful and enthusiastic Mr Tay has also been nominated, and shortlisted, for ISWAN's Personality of the Year. He has one of his many laughs at the mere idea of it. However, he is delighted that, "by God's grace", such attention will help put Mission to Seafarers in Sydney on the international map.

Grandparents conference expands

Good leadership and influence: the Rev Ian Barnett (above), addresses attendees at the conference.



"I DON'T THINK YOU FULLY UNDERSTAND just how important this could be," former Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione (left) told the third National Grandparents Conference at Figtree in Wollongong.

"If we can take this type of gathering and have an opportunity to influence a group of this size, you can start to change a nation," he added. "It would be generational, but you could start to change a nation."

The impact of those words was not lost on the founder of the conference and senior minister at Figtree Anglican, the Rev Ian Barnett. Rewind to 2016 and the first conference, prompted by Mr Barnett's reflection as his tribe of grandchildren doubled to six.

"I started to wonder what was the faith legacy that I was going to leave behind for my grandchildren to follow," he says."I looked around saw that the focus was mainly on things like retirement and superannuation.

"It felt like a huge missing piece of a puzzle that no one seemed to consider that grandparents were worth resourcing and encouraging, and little energy had been placed in capturing their wisdom and prayer power."

To that combination Andrew Scipione would add "influence" – a word that came up again and again during his keynote address to the packed auditorium at Figtree in June. The former Commissioner and grandfather of three has a powerful testimony of his conversion as a young teenager, closely followed by the death of his father.

"Life isn't perfect, bad things happen and I'd lost my dad," Mr Scipione told the conference. "So, I was potentially a ship on the ocean, without a rudder, with a lot of stormy weather to come. I give thanks, time and time and time again, for three men that were more like my grandparents in my church."

Belonging to an immigrant family, Mr Scipione's grandparents were not in Australia and he had never met them. "When it came to those three men that took the time to invest into me, to be grandads... they were a little bit older than my dad," he said. "They were instrumental in setting me up to fall forward in life. They influenced me."

The talk hit the themes Mr Barnett was hoping it would, enthusing the crowd – which grows each year and comes from further and further afield.

"The feelings I had when we started this conference were shared by many other grandparents," he says. "Not only was society putting them on the sideline but, in many cases, so was church. This drove me to start trying to do something to resource grandparents to truly consider the reality that God had not finished with them yet and that maybe their best years were ahead of them."

The man who retired at the top of the largest police force in Australia agrees. "I use the word 'influence' but influence and leadership are inextricably linked," Mr Scipione said in his talk. "You're an influencer, regardless of who you are. Whether you've got a grandchild yet or whether you don't.

"As a student of policing, you get to see that first hand, every day. You meet lives that are broken, tragedies that could have been averted that weren't. You start to see a common denominator. It's that lack of family connection, a lack of good leadership, of influence.

"I came from a broken home. It was because my father died but still a broken home. I didn't have that sort of support that I really needed, but I did through my church family."

Mr Scipione said it was a responsibility for everyone. "As you go about your life, particularly if you identify as Christian, people will watch you. I meet so many people who say, 'Look, I'm not a leader. I just live in a suburban house in a suburban street... I just go to work or I have finished work'. I say, 'Wrong. Stop.' Every engagement you have with anyone, you have some influence over them."

It's hard to argue with a former Commissioner. Another speaker took an informal roll call on the number of grandchildren each delegate had and the record was 23. If you multiply the grandchildren by the number of attendees it doesn't take long to see what Mr Scipione was talking about and the influence a conference like this could have.

Ian Barnett and the Figtree team are already preparing for conference number four in 2020, and have decided to expand it to two days: May 29-30. A larger team of seven speakers will include apologist Josh McDowell and former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson.

Mr Barnett is encouraged by the response so far. "One of the most moving comments I had from a grandmother at this year's conference was simply this: 'Ian, you have given me a purpose to live'."

Help offered on sexuality debates

PASTOR ED SHAW DOESN'T LIKE TO DESCRIBE HIMself as a "gay Christian".

"We tend to use the language of same-sex attraction," Mr Shaw (right) says. "We do that because the language 'I'm gay' has so often been used to signify that somebody is identifying themselves by their sexuality, and that somebody has embraced a lifestyle that is an active homosexual lifestyle.

"We talk about experiencing same-sex attraction because it just includes more people, and includes us."

Ed Shaw is pastor of Emmanuel City Centre Church in Bristol, England and is heading to Australia for a series of talks sharing his experiences in dealing with issues of same-sex attraction and church responses.

He is one of the founders of www.livingout.org, which is a community of Christians who experience same-sex attraction and bring out into the open the questions and dilemmas they often face. The group stands for a biblical position on sexuality, which Mr Shaw says is clear.

"I think what I find so convincing about what the Bible says about sexuality, sex and marriage and homosexuality, is that there's a consistent line all the way through, right from Genesis all the way through to Revelation," he says. "This is a really clear stress on the fact that marriage is for life, that marriage is for a man and a woman and that sex is just for marriage. It shouldn't happen outside."

As well as visiting some local churches, he will be speaking at a series of events organised by Liberty Christian Ministries, a group which works among same-sex attracted Christians.

On Tuesday, August 20, Mr Shaw will be the keynote speaker at a ministry conference with the theme "Creating a biblically inclusive church". The following day, in conjunction with the Centre for Christian Living, he will speak on the topic "Why we need Jesus' help with our sexualities". This is aimed at all parishioners and will support the principles discussed during the Tuesday conference.

The final event of the week, on August 23, is for young adults and youth and is titled "Jesus is great news for a rainbow world!" To be held at St Paul's, Carlingford, it will seek to encourage young Christians to have confidence in the Bible's teaching on matters of sexuality and godliness.

Mr Shaw will draw on the principles outlined in his book *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction*. He argues that Christians have a problem when it comes to people who experience same-sex attraction and churches need to offer a plausible alternative to the message society gives us about homosexuality.

The issue, he says, is that Christians have have not fully understood and embraced what Christ offers to those who are same-sex attracted. "Throughout human history up until very recently, no Christians have ever taken any different line on the Bible [on matters of sexuality]. And the only reason I can see for people to change their mind is what's happening in society around us, not what the Bible says.

"Sex isn't the only way for deeper, meaningful relationships with other people. Obviously, it can be something that brings great depth and meaning to a relationship between a man and woman and the Bible is really encouraging of that. But the Bible is also really clear that deeper, meaningful relationships happen in a whole range of contexts."

Despite the headline-dominating debates over homosexuality in which churches are so often condemned, Mr Shaw see an opportunity in the current focus on sexuality, gender and identity.

"God is being good to us by making us think hard about these issues," he says. "We have lost contact with a lot of what the Bible teaches about each of those areas; and all the cultural changes are making us really think and rearticulate biblical truths that we have rather ignored and not particularly embraced."

Key events in Mr Shaw's visit will be live streamed. For details see www.liberty.sydney

SDS champions governance training

Stephen Kerr (left) from the CMA Standards Council with Rob Wicks and the corporate secretary of SDS, Briony Bounds.

EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE HIGH GOVERNANCE STANDARDS FOR BOARDS AND COUNCILS ACROSS the Diocese appear to be paying off, with training courses oversubscribed.

"It's a good problem to have," says Rob Wicks, the CEO of Sydney Diocesan Services (SDS), which is taking a lead in facilitating courses on good governance. "We are seeing unprecedented interest in this kind of training as people become increasingly aware of their responsibilities as members of diocesan boards."

Last year, SDS engaged the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) to run its three-day Foundations of Directorship course for members of diocesan organisations. Twenty-five people from a range of diocesan boards and school councils participated.

"The course attracted more participants than there were places available," Mr Wicks says. "Participants all said they would recommend the course to other members of their board or council and were full of praise for both the quality and relevance of the course."

During the course, those taking part learn about their roles as directors – including models of good governance, strategy and risk, and how to assess financial performance. The course was held again this year in June and July and was a resounding success.

Underscoring this renewed focus on governance, SDS has been granted accreditation by the Christian Ministry Advancement (CMA) Standards Council for its governance. The accreditation was recognised in front of 400 delegates at the CMA annual conference this year in Melbourne.

Scripture Union NSW and Compassion Australia were also recognised at the conference. The Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid was accredited last year as part of the pilot program.

"Accreditation is a significant step for diocesan organisations," Mr Wicks says. "The charity regulator – the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) – considers that CMA-accredited organisations comply with its own governance standards."

Mr Wicks says SDS is planning future AICD courses as part of its strategic plan. "I'm pleased to see those putting themselves forward for Christian service are aware of the need for integrity and good governance, both for its own sake and for the sake of public trust."

All the Saints doing God's work

Care outreach: Nowra rector Geoff Thompson with his assistant Robin Vonk.

THE COMMUNITY CARE WORK AT ALL SAINTS', NOWRA IS RECEIVING A MAJOR BOOST THROUGH a new partnership with Anglicare, which will see a range of services offered onsite to support struggling locals.

The town is surrounded by beauty – bush, beaches, riverland, farms and national parks – but Nowra rector the Rev Geoff Thompson says that under the surface there are many people doing it tough.

"Nowra is an enigma," he says. "There's a great coffee culture and the area has amazing natural beauty, but there is also a whole range of social problems – such as high youth unemployment, domestic violence and ice addiction.

"Thirty years ago this was a country town, a regional town, but now there's no industry for modern kids to go into... Like most country towns it suddenly grew, and then it outgrew its own social clothes."

For more than 25 years the parish has had an emergency relief ministry in response to the homelessness and poverty growing up around it. Mr Thompson says those involved in this ministry have served "so faithfully – and they're still serving" but adds that, from a government perspective, "the landscape of how to serve the homeless community has changed".

Enter Anglicare. The organisation already has a busy Nowra ministry with a range of support services. However, it will soon be linked with All Saints' in a more concrete way, running many of these services from a former rectory on church property.

Teresa Clark, Anglicare's head of food and financial assistance, says, "We're helping the church with donated food, so that they're able to provide food parcels directly out to the community. And we'll also be supporting with material aid, so that people who are in crisis situations, we can support them with things like rent arrears, removalists, limited white goods – that sort of thing.

"We can refer out to other agencies but also provide some of that material assistance as well."

Anglicare will have a case worker at its new location to help locals on a longer-term basis, and will continue to offer no-interest loans as well as financial counselling.

"We've never been able to do financial counselling in the community before so it's very exciting to be able to provide that now," Mrs Clark says. "The counsellors will be working with people who have debt issues to try and find holistic solutions. They advocate and try to work out payment plans with suppliers and providers, but also they advocate to get debt written off when they can."

Dianne Hilliar, Anglicare's partnerships development officer for the Wollongong Region, says closer links with parishes helps Anglicare do more for the community.

"We help people of all faiths and creeds and backgrounds," she says. "By coming alongside churches and helping augment what they can do, we're just enabling them to serve the community better – and we are honouring Jesus."

The All Saints' community is banding together to help raise the $100,000 or so needed to renovate the former rectory for its new role.

Says Mr Thompson: "We asked the congregation if they were behind this. People have made pledges and we're about to lodge a development application. We'll need to borrow as well but it's a very exciting time for our church.

"In this kind of environment among the socially challenged this is an important expression of compassion. Not just our compassion, but God's compassion through us."

Anglicare's southern expansion

THE SERVICES ANGLICARE OFFERS THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE DIOCESE HAVE GROWN SIGNIFicantly since July 1, when the organisation took over four Mission Australia shops in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

The head of retail for Anglicare Sydney, Ian Moore, says the "significant and exciting" changes include a move into corporate clothing collection and extending Anglicare's presence in employment programs and online sales.

"We have also acquired a computer refurbishment and second-hand electrical business, which we will be trialling over the next 12 months," he says.

Equipment has been installed at all four shop sites – in Dapto, North Wollongong, Nowra and Thirroul – to recycle clothing donations that can't be resold by repurposing them as cleaning fabric.

Mr Moore says the 27 Mission Australia staff and 80 volunteers "bring enormous passion and experience" to the stores. "We are grateful for their enthusiastic response about joining the Anglicare team so that they can continue to serve their local communities.

"We want our stores to be more than just another place to find quality clothes that won't break the budget," he adds. "Many of our stores should be a hub for the community, where customers can access other services or affordable food... We are also looking forward to working closely with churches to help connect our customers to the wider community and build positive relationships."

Honour for leading rector

Significant ministry: the Rev Canon Simon Manchester.

THE RECTOR OF NORTH SYDNEY, THE REV SIMON MANCHESTER, HAS BEEN GIVEN A RARE HONour as he prepares to step down from his parish ministry at the end of this year.

Archbishop Glenn Davies has announced that Mr Manchester will join a select list of leaders who have been made honorary clerical Canons of St Andrew's Cathedral.

The list includes theologian Dr James Packer and Mr Manchester's brother-in-law David Short, made Canons by then Archbishop Peter Jensen after the Anglican crisis in Canada in 2008.

Dr Davies announced the appointment last month, with immediate effect. Canon Manchester served curacies in Wollongong and at St Helen's, Bishopsgate in London before returning to Sydney and becoming rector of Lalor Park and Kings Langley. He has also had a lengthy involvement with the Cornhill Sydney preaching course.

"Sydney has been blessed by the ministry of Simon Manchester over many years," Dr Davies says. "Simon completes, this year, a tenure of 30 years as rector of St Thomas' Church, North Sydney. During that time his influence has not been restricted to North Sydney as he has been a regular teacher of the Bible on radio and exercised a significant international ministry.

"It is a great privilege for me to appoint him an honorary Canon of St Andrew's Cathedral as a reflection of the warmth and esteem in which he is held and for his outstanding contribution to the Diocese of Sydney and to the kingdom of God."

Canon Manchester says he is touched by the honour. "This kind gesture from the Archbishop reflects the Lord's own goodness and mercy since he sees our faulty efforts and continues to be patient and gracious," he says.

"The 30 years have been a huge privilege and as I finish at North Sydney I will see this Canon message as 'You're loved' and not 'You're fired!'"

Gospel fruit the focus for southwest

Sharing ministry challenges: a discussion group at the MSDAC conference.

A DIOCESAN GROUP SEEKING TO BOOST MINISTRY IN SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AREAS HAS taken its work to the heart of things with a conference in Sydney's southwest.

"It was a rare opportunity for people in often difficult, lonely and isolated ministry contexts to be encouraged by God's word, shared experiences and to be aware that the Diocese is doing something to address this issue," says Eddie Ozols, operations manager of the Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid.

Anglican Aid is one of the groups represented on the Ministry to Socially Disadvantaged Areas Committee, established three years ago under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Wollongong, Peter Hayward.

Despite being saddled with the unwieldy acronym MSDAC, the committee is doing important work and the conference it organised last month at Rosemeadow Anglican Church attracted ministers and staff from churches across the Diocese.

The day began with a challenge from the head of the Department of Mission at Moore College, the Rev Simon Gillham.

"Simon spoke about the wealthy Western church being a blip in history," Mr Ozols says. "There is no cavalry coming to rescue us."

The rector of St Luke's, Liverpool, the Rev Stuart Pearson, says he was encouraged and challenged. "Simon challenged us with 'You measure what you treasure' and the Scriptures' encouragement to measure fruitfulness of gospel ministry rather than the dollars in the plate and the numbers sitting in church."

Mr Pearson says that while his own church is in one of the 30 most socially disadvantaged parishes in Sydney, it has also been blessed.

"God has graciously provided us with some godly and very capable lay people who serve across a variety of ministries because they have a missionary heart to the southwest," he says. "We have capable people who are able to serve as wardens and parish councillors and treasurer. There are some churches that struggle to get the sort of people to fulfil these roles that church governance requires, and this can add to the already pressing demands on the minister."

Mr Pearson adds that he was struck at the conference by the need to be flexible in ministry.

"I was impressed by the work being done at Albion Park and the minister's readiness to shape the ministry on Sunday in such a way that fits the people of the area he is ministering in," he says.

Rosemeadow local Tara Fryer was interviewed about her journey from parishioner to trainee. "My husband and I moved into Appin in 2016," she says. "The next year, I started doing my Certificate 4 in Ministry and Theology through Vocational Bible College, which I finished last year. This year I am doing Ministry Training Scheme (MTS) at Rosemeadow Anglican Church and doing my Diploma in Ministry and Theology through Vocational Bible College."

Some of the churches represented at the conference are being helped by Anglican Aid, which supports more than 20 parishes in disadvantaged areas.

Says project officer Lucy Lim: "Parish and postcode boundaries do not necessarily correlate to disadvantage. Eagle Vale and Redfern are not specifically disadvantaged but operate in areas of deep disadvantage. While we are focused on overseas missions, there is a huge mission here in Sydney."

She believes partnership development across the Diocese works both ways. "Well-off churches can be blessed by the less well-off in encouraging them," she says. "Other churches can provide personnel to assist – some churches do not even have the personnel to undertake warden roles or look after finances.

"The Diocese could encourage churches to better co-ordinate their support, so that some churches with good connections are not advantaged at the expense of churches that may not have the same connections."

Lausanne sees God at work in Manila

"God uses our work to do his work in us": Delphine Fanfon at Lausanne Manila.

"I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF THE NEXT GREAT MOVES OF GOD IS GOING TO BE THROUGH BELIEVERS in the workplace," said Billy Graham at the turn of the century. Almost two decades later, those words inspired the first Lausanne conference devoted entirely to Christians at work.

The movement, which began in the 1970s as the brainchild of Dr Graham and John Stott, brought together 850 people from 109 nations to Manila in June for the Global Workplace Forum (GWF2019). Attendees included doctors, designers, entrepreneurs, engineers, venture capitalists, carpenters and computer programmers.

Michael Oh, the global executive director of the Lausanne Movement, welcomed the delegates, saying churches have been trying to reach out through the 1 per cent, the ministers, instead of the other 99 per cent, the workers.

"Every Christian should have a ministry... one of the most important roles for a pastor is to support the ministry of the 99 per cent," he said. "Here, again, we can see the wisdom of God's cutting-edge strategy. He equipped the church to be ambassadors in all the world. How? By sending his people into every sphere of society... by his gifting of them in the arts, media, sports, technology, science, fashion, you name it.

"Most ministers have no access to those spheres. They literally have no business being there, while other Christians literally have business being there. It's your business. That's God's design."

Prominent business figures spoke in panel sessions about bringing faith to bear on the 90,000 hours – or roughly one-third of a person's lifetime – which is spent at work. GWF2019 called for Christians globally to move away from a mindset that leaves faith and work in separate boxes in our lives.

"The marketplace is becoming increasingly open to the idea of bringing your whole self to work, including your faith," said Dr David Miller, director of the Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative.

Another speaker, venture capitalist Henry Kaestner, spoke of the surprising Christian workplace groups happening in the tech hub of Silicon Valley, California. "It's where Google and Facebook, Salesforce and Uber have new or emerging resurgent employee resource groups – faith-driven employee resource groups," he said.

"Companies like Apple are having Christ followers getting together to pray for one another in the business. They're doing praise and worship music now in the lunch room at Dropbox. So in the place that you'd think it wouldn't happen, it is. Aslan is on the move."

Leadership consultant and business coach, Delphine Fanfon, said her personal journey was helped by confidence in God and her worth. "God uses our work to do his work in us," she said.

"Besides what boxes anybody else can try to put you or put me in, it is ultimately the one I put myself in, in my mind, that is going to determine what I do or not do at the workplace.

"If my understanding of who and what God says I am is that important, as I claim it is, I should give myself permission to bring it with me everywhere I go, especially to my workplace."

Archbishop Glenn Davies, secretary of the Lausanne board of directors, said it was an important conference and that clergy should not forget their responsibility to prepare the "99 per cent" for their work in the world.

Speaking to a plenary session, Dr Davies also reminded delegates of the importance of rest.

"You will never fully understand work unless you have understood rest," he said. "Proper rest, including sabbath rest, is the biblical antidote to burnout."

LAMBETH IDEA

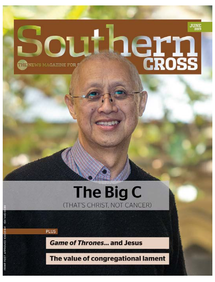
I read with interest the Archbishop's fine comprehensive article entitled "Grounding fellowship in truth" (*SC*, June). However, as a humble founding member of GAFCON Australia I feel that slightly more lateral thinking is required to prevent Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference from being overturned and/or modified next year.

Our seven bishops may not want to spend days in the University of Kent in 2020 with a number of their revisionist peers, but many people believe that it will not be God's will for such motions to be successful, as it will be contrary to biblical truth. In the past, Dr Glenn Davies has even said that, if there had been a vote at the 2008 Lambeth Conference, the Sydney Anglican bishops would have attended.

A way around this problem is for the GAFCON and other Anglican bishops who do not wish to attend Lambeth 2020 to request that they be able to cast their votes on such motions by proxy, by post or even electronically. If these requests are turned down by the Archbishop of Canterbury's office in Lambeth, GAFCON could publish a list of those bishops not attending and their votes on the relevant motions. Then we will know what the global Anglican episcopacy feels about the motions and not just those attending the "Canterbury Communion".

As our Archbishop is a good diplomat, we could (with an even "louder voice") make headway with this proposal in the appropriate quarters, either directly or via intermediaries, for the benefit of Christ's global Church and for biblical truth – even though, sadly, fellowship would remain impaired.

Peter M.G. Young
Mosman



PIZZA BISHOP

Regarding your article on Bishop Ivan Lee (*SC*, June), I have a comical story about him that occurred a few years ago, and now seems a good time to tell it.

A very good friend of mine invited me to his church in Western Sydney to attend the 6pm evening service. Thirty minutes into the service a Chinese man walked into the church with a pizza box in his hands. I assumed he was making a delivery, although I thought it was a little odd for him to walk into the church itself.

I later discovered that it was Bishop Ivan Lee, who was the guest speaker and was running late. I was introduced to him while having coffee afterwards and told him of my mistake – he thought it was very amusing.

Bishop Lee turned out to be a very nice gentleman, and I feel honoured to have met him at St Thomas', Cranebrook. I am sure he is in all our prayers.

Peter L. Grimmett
St Clair

REAL PC CONCERNS

I can assure James Moore (Letters, *SC*, June) that concerns about political correctness are usually real, justified and not a form of abuse. The decade-long discussion of same-sex marriage is a good example of the harassment invited by simply putting forward a traditional point of view.

Those in favour of changing the definition of marriage rarely even tried to produce an argument in favour of the change. We were simply bombarded with slogans about marriage equality, equal love, being on the right side of history, no discrimination and "love is love". Those who dared to question these slogans were not answered with arguments but were called bigots and homophobes.

For decades I have been writing letters to newspapers and magazines about these things, but for many of those years I was not alert enough to realise that the woolly thinking being encouraged was to some extent part of an antisocial, anti-Christian movement bent on seducing the Western world.

David Morrison
Springwood

NO GAME

Hannah Thiem's piece on the evangelistic use of *Game of Thrones* in the June issue points out biblical truths illustrated by the show. But her rationale in defence of Christians viewing it is unconvincing.

True, the Bible records instances of brutal violence and sexual mistreatment. But *Game of Thrones* is a visual not a textual medium, and its boundary-pushing display of carnage and sex is intrinsic to its appeal.

Perhaps some Christians can watch it without adverse effect; perhaps it's prudish to demur about contemporary cultural output. But is there a line? And how will we know if we've crossed it?

Jonathan Adams
Turramurra

PUBLIC PROBLEM

What a refreshing letter to read from Callum Irving (Letters, *SC*, June) supporting public education.

Like the Anglican schools that are continually advertised in *SC*, the public education system is not perfect. It is however the real world, and inclusive, where students mix with all of society. It would have been appropriate for the stories on public education in the June edition to have been seen as worthy to be included in the proper "Choices" supplement in May so as to reflect all choices.

The tendency of the Sydney Diocese, and its hierarchy, to overlook public education is a failing that should be addressed. The Christian parents, students, teachers and the many volunteer SRE teachers in public schools deserve much more recognition.

John Cotterill
Kingsford

FOLAU FURPHY

I have to take issue with sentiments expressed by Bishop Michael Stead in June's *Southern Cross*.

He is quoted as saying that what Israel Folau posted "is essentially a summary of the Bible". Really? The way that Folau presented his post distorts the definition of sin. Am I to get the impression that because I am not a drunk, a homosexual, an adulterer, a liar, a thief, an atheist or an idolater, I do not need to repent? I don't recognise myself in the sins listed in the other "proof texts" either. If we need to be moralistic, what about the summary of the law given by Jesus himself in Mark 12:30?

I was intrigued by the example of persecution that Bishop Stead used from Acts ("Stand firm"). Apart from its being the wrong reference (it's in fact chapter 17), why did he omit the first clause of verse 5 and in his summary refer only to "people"? My New Testament clearly uses the word "Ioudaioi". Is this political correctness or a laudable attempt to evade the undoubted anti-Judaism of the New Testament lest it be construed as anti-Semitism?

Marie McInnes
Springwood

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A MOVE FOR THE HOUSE OF YORK

After almost a decade in charge of the parish of West Ryde, the **Rev Mal York** will become rector of Roseville on September 5.

As nominators from different churches had begun to approach he and his wife Heather about a possible move, he says, "we saw this as a sign from God that maybe our time at West Ryde had come to an end. There are things that need to be done at West Ryde, of course, and we could've stayed to do them or let someone fresh come in".

He says he and his wife "really like what's been happening at Roseville – there's a good foundation there. The church is in a really healthy place and, God willing, we can build upon that. We grew up in the area as well. We know people but because we've been out of the area and come back, we will hopefully be of more benefit to the church."

Heather York has been involved in running Bible studies at West Ryde and meeting up with people one to one, as well as running the parish's "belonging" team. With a bigger staff team at Roseville – including a women's minister – they will "get to know and love the church" while her role becomes clearer. However, Mr York adds, "one of the things she will definitely be taking to Roseville is her gift of hospitality!"

Numbers at West Ryde have grown by about 300 per cent during their time in the parish, and Mr York says the family has loved sharing their lives with the people there.

"As a family we're leaving people that we love but we think it's also a good opportunity for a new minister to come into West Ryde and, God willing, build the church even more.

"We've got a large international community at West Ryde and when I announced that I was going, a lot of them were asking why. Often, from their point of view, you only leave when something is wrong. And it was hard to say to them that there's nothing wrong with you or West Ryde – we love you very much! But we felt under God that it was the right time to move on."

NEW PRINCIPAL FOR DANEBANK

The head of teaching and learning at SCECGS Redlands, **Dr Emma Burgess**, will become the next principal of Danebank school in 2020. She will replace Maryanne Davis, who retires at the end of this year after a decade at the helm.

The chairman of The Anglican Schools Corporation, Philip Bell, and the chairman of the school council, Dr Richard Sharpe, said in a statement that it had become clear during their selection process that Dr Burgess would be "the best person to lead Danebank into its next phase of growth and development".

"Dr Burgess [is] a brilliant thinker, strategist and a visionary educational leader... [and] brings a deep commitment to the provision of an exemplary education that offers the best in learning and care for staff and girls," they said.

"The fact that Danebank is grounded in the Christian faith, and the school is so clearly shaped by the gospel, is at the heart of Dr Burgess' desire to serve the school as its next principal."

Prior to her years at SCECGS Redlands, Dr Burgess was head of the senior school at St Michael's Collegiate School in Hobart and deputy principal of Guilford Young College, also in Hobart.

She has a PhD in educational leadership and a Masters of Education in educational management, as well as an Associate Diploma in Music, in piano.

Said Dr Burgess of her appointment: "Mrs Davis, together with her exceptional staff, has positioned Danebank as a leading school for girls. I am delighted and honoured to build on that remarkable legacy, to lead and serve the school in this next phase."

VALE

The **Rev Kay Clark** died on June 21, aged 69. Born Kay Lynette Hebblewhite on October 15, 1949, she grew up in Sydney, attending St Clement's, Mosman, then studied science and worked as a biochemist.

She married Russell Clark in late 1970 and they were accepted by CMS as missionaries in 1973. The next decade in Hong Kong included Sunday school leadership and parish council at St Andrew's, Kowloon, chairmanship of a day nursery for single mothers and their babies, and English teaching for nurses at the United Christian Hospital. It was there that she was first invited to preach.

Back in Sydney in the mid-1980s, Mrs Clark led Sunday school at Beecroft and taught SRE. She was the first person to complete a ThL at the Robert Menzies School for Christian Studies under the Rev Dr Paul Barnett, leading to an MA through Moore College.

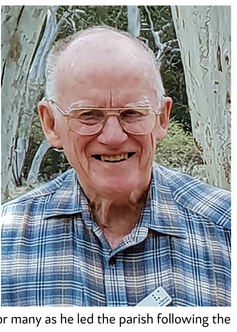
She returned to the workforce in 1993 for the Diocesan Board of Education as well as in breast cancer research. In 1995 she developed locally advanced breast cancer with a poor prognosis but was cured – although she cheerfully stated she would only know she was cured when she died of something else! That year she also joined the team at St Matthew's, West Pennant Hills, and was ordained a deacon in 2000.

The Clarks served again as missionaries, this time in Tanzania, from 2002-2008 – Mrs Clark at a critical stage in the development of the Munguishi Bible School. Three times a week she drove 80 kilometres from Moshi to Munguishi along very dangerous roads. She was heavily involved in student ministry and chapel duties at the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre in Moshi, as well as in the local church.

After returning to Australia, Mrs Clark worked at St Michael's, Vaucluse, where her vocation as a pastor and Bible teacher was fully appreciated until she retired in 2012 (brain cancer symptoms became apparent in 2011). In 2014 she was invited by the CMS council to be a vice president in recognition of her services to the society and, in 2015, was awarded an OAM for services to the Anglican Church.

Says Russell Clark: "Life was difficult for Kay from late 2015 but she showed resilience, perseverance and a complete trust in the goodness of God. She inspired all who met her. Her life was celebrated at a funeral with standing room only for the 500 who attended".

Mrs Clark wishes to be remembered by what she learnt from the Tanzanian Christians that "God is good all the time, and all the time God is good".



The **Rev John Baxter** died on April 16.

Born on July 14, 1936, Mr Baxter worked as a schoolteacher before beginning studies at Moore College in 1960; after graduating he married his wife Consuelo. He was curate at St Marys with Rooty Hill until 1965, curate-in-charge of Rooty Hill with Mount Druitt from 1965-68, then spent 2½ years training Scripture and Sunday school teachers across the NSW South Coast.

In 1970 the family moved to the lower Blue Mountains, where he was rector of Glenbrook until his retirement in 1996. During this time – according to the current rector of the Lower Mountains, the Rev Ken Noakes – Mr Baxter also oversaw ministries in Warrimoo, Blaxland and Mount Riverview.

"John was a reserved and shy man who courageously led our parish with an evangelical passion to hear the Bible taught well and for it to shape both the lives of our church family members and the ministries our church ran," Mr Noakes says. "He was a mentor to many, a teacher to generations... a selfless friend and confidant. He was also the pastoral rock for many as he led the parish following the Granville rail disaster."

According to Mr Baxter's son Philip, his father's ministry gifts were most clearly seen in how he taught and mentored others.

"This was as true in the training and guidance of student ministers, curates and lay preachers as it was in his work with Sudanese communities in western Sydney, in school-based Christian education programs, in global mission with the Bible League and in the ESL classes he led on his retirement to the Central Coast," Mr Baxter said at his father's memorial service.

"In his later years John... filled locum roles in more than a dozen parishes in Sydney and across the Armidale Diocese – as far as Lightning Ridge in NSW – and he was also an adviser to new church planting teams.

"John's life was a testimony to the impact of the gospel and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit on him."

Recognise the source of our strength

Dr Glenn Davies

AT THE RECENT LAUSANNE GATHERING IN MANILA (SEE P.13), A BOOK WAS launched that took me by surprise. Its title is *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure*, edited by David C. Deuel and Nathan G. John.

Dr Nathan John is an Australian author whose real name has been suppressed for security reasons as he is part of a network of disability providers across India. Dr David Deuel serves as a Catalyst for Disability Concerns with the Lausanne Movement and is a senior research fellow for the Christian Institute on Disability – part of the Joni and Friends International Disability Centre in California.

Many will know the name of Joni Eareckson (now Eareckson Tada), who wrote of her experiences in the 1976 international bestselling autobiography *Joni: An Unforgettable Story*, which has been translated into many languages.

The thrust of the book is that having a disability does not prevent you from serving Christ, nor should it prevent mission organisations from employing people with disabilities. Joni is a living testimony to the way in which her extreme disability has neither quenched her spirit to serve Christ nor impeded her ability to do so, in no less than an international ministry. In her own words: "Disability ministry is not disability ministry unless the disabled are ministering".

Reading this book gave me pause to wonder about our Church's attitude to the disabled. I also recalled a remark made by an old school friend, who contracted polio through his mother's breast milk: "Well, actually we're all disabled in one way or another".

How true! It is just that the able bodied do not see their own weaknesses. We all live in a fallen world where imperfection surrounds us and dwells within us, whether manifested physically, emotionally or spiritually. Yet God has made us in his own image and so our worth is invaluable, even if certain imperfections are more obvious than others.

When Moses claimed his oratorical imperfections would prevent him from pursuing God's mission, God reminded him: "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:11-12).

Recognising our weakness is the hallmark of the gospel, for it is only in the strength that God supplies that we are strong.

I recently met a Christian friend who informed me that he and his wife had had another baby. This was news to me as I had known that one of their children had multiple health issues, though by God's grace she had been progressively overcoming them. However, when the father told me that their latest newborn child had been diagnosed with Down Syndrome, my instinctive reaction was to respond by saying: "I am sorry to hear that".

I later received a warm and engaging email from the mother, who gently chided me for my response. Her email, which I quote with her permission, is instructive for us all:

I totally understand the feeling. People with disabilities have had such bad publicity! But in the light that 9 out of 10 mothers that are given the Down Syndrome diagnosis antenatally decide to abort the baby, joy and not sorrow is what should be expressed at the birth of a baby with Down Syndrome.

In our culture where tailored children are what society is after and [people] mercilessly seek the extermination of anyone that doesn't meet the requirements of beauty, health and intelligence, I believe that we Christians need to speak up. We as parents made a stand by having decided to have our beautiful daughter even though we were told that she would probably have Down Syndrome.

And you, in your position given by our Lord, have the chance to speak up for the disabled and unwanted people in our society. We take no offence in your comment. We deeply respect and admire you and because of this, I wanted to write this note.

I have learned in these last five months of being a mum of a baby with Down Syndrome that "sorry" is an unwelcome word for parents. I found it hard to accept that my child would be called "disabled", that she would struggle with the most simple things like feeding, crawling, walking, and that the list of all the possible ailments that could affect her in some point in her life was longer than my arm!

But in the first weeks I read a story of some parents who, after they received the diagnosis of their baby, an unknown man, a father of a child with Down Syndrome, called them and said, "I heard you have won the lotto!" That changed something inside me. What if rather than pointing to all the things my girl will lack, I look at all the things she will achieve, and most importantly, all that she is because she bears God's image?

So I want to encourage you to be the one that brings the good words, the one that smiles and says, "Congratulations! What is her/his name?" Because there is joy in a life, in a newborn. And there is even more joy when that little one has been rescued from the evil of our society that says that her life is not worth living because she has Down Syndrome.

Well, I was rightly chastened by these thoughtful and challenging words. As the apostle Paul puts it: 'We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us' (2 Corinthians 4:7). SC

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

A spiritual measuring tape

As a Diocese we committed to deepening our members' spiritual maturity as part of Mission 2020, but what does spiritual growth look like as individuals – and as a church? COLIN MARSHALL writes.

HOW MATURE IS THE CONGREGATION WE BELONG TO? MORE TO the point, how am I tracking in Christian maturity? We don't like to think about this too much. Embarrassingly, the inner child, inherited from our first parents, emerges all too often. Pride, impatience, jealousy, grudges, unabashed self-interest.

Maturity is not guaranteed by age or experience. For me, this stage of life with fewer formal responsibilities and more discretionary time is a test of my actual heart motivations. Thinking about maturity is both confronting and deeply motivating. Is it God himself or the challenge of the next project that energises me; the chase or the prize?

We're all committed to the idea of maturity. So, what does the mature Christian look like? How can we know if we are growing to maturity?

As I agonised over this, John Calvin (in Book 3 of his *Institutes*) confirmed my serious reservations in writing on the subject: "I know that in addressing the topic of the mature Christian life, I am entering on a vast and complex subject. Even if I were merely to summarise all that has been written by others on this topic, the result would be a long and dense volume".

We know that, as 2 Timothy says, all Scripture is given by God for our salvation and training in righteousness that we might be complete, equipped for every good work. So, we could list a depressingly endless number of virtues and attributes of the mature Christian. Or study central themes like sanctification or godliness, or go to purple passages such as Romans 12 or the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5, or consider the attributes of children born of God in 1 John. Or simply settle for faith, hope and love.

Every approach to this subject is selective. I will focus mainly on Paul's letters where he explicitly uses the language or concept of maturity. We'll consider the measure, the means and the marks of maturity. I've also been reading a book called *Reformation Anglicanism*, so along the way I will pass on some juicy quotes revealing how our Anglican forebear, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, thought about maturity.

THE MEASURE OF MATURITY

How high is the bar? It's tempting to settle for a fairly low maturity bar to pander to our comforts. But that is not an option.

Christ himself is the measure of maturity. The goal of all ministry is to build Christ's body, the church, "to mature manhood, to the *measure* of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13, cf. Romans 8:30). In the case of loving our enemies, we are called to be perfect (or mature), as God is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48). The maturity bar is uncomfortably high.

God's grand, eternal plan is to build a people of extraordinary Christ-like maturity, a God-like people. Maturity is at the heart of God's purpose for us, to restore his fallen image-bearers, for his glory. Nothing could be more important than rightly assessing our maturity and making progress.

THE MEANS OF MATURITY

What fuels our Christian growth?

My old memory verses are a reasonable starting point. They have shaped how I think about the Christian life and ministry.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ (Colossians 1:27-28).

Paul's goal is wide and deep – everyone (including Gentiles) mature in Christ. To that end he is single-minded in proclaiming Christ, warning and teaching with all wisdom.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians is a rich vision of the mature Christian:

We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father (Colossians 1:9-12a).

The knowledge of God is the means of our maturity. We need to be filled with the knowledge of his will, through knowing Christ.

We need "all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ". This is because we are in imminent danger of being taken captive "by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:1-8).

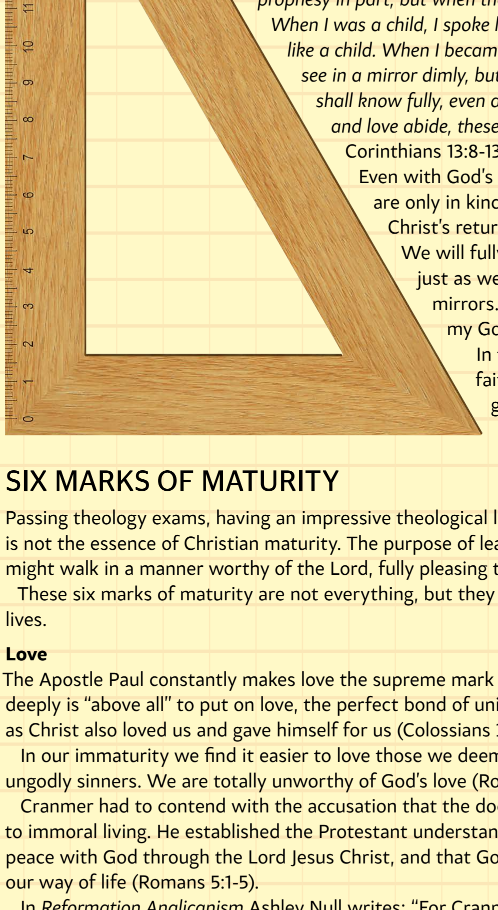
We are caught up in a war between Christ and the principalities and powers of Satan, as he furiously resists the serpent crusher.

The immature Christian will be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Ephesians 4:14). With our unlimited access online – and in social media – to every conceivable doctrine, it feels to me that every wind of doctrine is more like a cyclone of confusion threatening to swallow us up in its vortex. Probably no different in the less "techy" world of the first century.

The framework of reality that is in Christ is the only reality that is not fake. Maturity begins with the mind, thinking like God about the real world where Christ is Lord and Saviour.

In one of his most well-known Collects (short prayers) written for the second Sunday of Advent, Thomas Cranmer captures the sufficiency of the Bible for our faith and maturity.

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant us to hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.



This is a prayer for our diligence in knowing the Bible well in order to hold on to the salvation we have in Christ.

My friends in Ireland have launched a ministry called Theology Ireland with two powerful rationales: theology is for everyone and a strong church requires a theologically astute laity.

Sometimes we might feel that such theological learning is not practical, but how can knowing the revealed mind of God in Scripture be anything but reforming for our life and church?

In a remarkable passage about our maturity, Paul makes it clear that having the knowledge of God is not an end in itself. Our knowledge of God in Christ is only partial and imperfect in this world.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Even with God's good gifts for the building of his church, we are only in kindergarten. Only when the perfect comes at Christ's return will we finally grow up to full maturity. We will fully know God, face to face in his presence, just as we are fully known by God. No more cloudy mirrors. What an astonishing prospect – to know my God as well as he knows me.

In this new world of perfect knowing, only faith, hope and love remain, but love is the greatest, and never ends, for God himself is love.

SIX MARKS OF MATURITY

Passing theology exams, having an impressive theological library or debating finer theological points is not the essence of Christian maturity. The purpose of learning the knowledge of God is *so that* we might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him (Colossians 1:10).

These six marks of maturity are not everything, but they are essential and shape every aspect of our lives.

Love

The Apostle Paul constantly makes love the supreme mark of maturity. The fruit of learning Christ deeply is "above all" to put on love, the perfect bond of unity. We are to imitate God and walk in love as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us (Colossians 3:14; Ephesians 5:1-2).

In our immaturity we find it easier to love those we deem worthy. But Christ died for us helpless, ungodly sinners. We are totally unworthy of God's love (Romans 5:6-8).

Cranmer had to contend with the accusation that the doctrine of justification by faith would lead to immoral living. He established the Protestant understanding that, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and that God's love poured into our hearts transforms our way of life (Romans 5:1-5).

In *Reformation Anglicanism* Ashley Null writes: "For Cranmer, unconditional love was the hallmark of true Christianity. He was famous for not holding a grudge against his many enemies, no matter how close they came to bringing about his destruction. This emphasis on God's love for the unworthy would be the common thread that ran throughout Cranmer's subsequent theological writings."

Cranmer's first *Book of Homilies* owes its origin to the reform program he initiated with his colleagues after the Church of England broke with Rome in 1534. His fourth homily distinguishes between a dead and a lively faith. A faith bereft of unconditional love for others was no saving faith.

There is one faith which in Scripture is called a dead faith, which bringeth forth no good works, but is idle, barren and unfruitful. And such a manner of faith have the wicked and naughty Christian people which 'confess God', as Saint Paul saith, 'in their mouth, but deny him in their deeds, being abominable and without the right faith'.

Another faith there is in Scripture which is not idle, unfruitful and dead, but 'worketh by charity' as Saint Paul declareth; which, as the other vain faith is called a dead faith, so may this be called a quick or lively faith.

We can measure by our "charity" if we have a dead or lively faith. Let us be warned: immature faith is presumptuous and deadly.

Costly Christ-like love for others is not an optional extra, but necessary evidence of a saving, justifying faith that has enlivened our hearts.

Discernment

Paul prayed for the believers in Philippi that their love might abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that they might approve what is excellent (Philippians 1:9; cf. Romans 12:1-2).

Knowledge, love and discernment are all closely connected. As we learn Christ and learn to love, the obvious question is which preacher, author or blogger has the true truth. The one who impresses, entertains and agrees with us, of course!

It's the Corinthian problem, a cautionary tale of immaturity.

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ... For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

In short, the Corinthian believers lacked discernment. Paul contrasts the natural person and the spiritual person to make the point.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned... But we have the mind of Christ (2:14, 16).

Are we convinced that in the apostolic gospel we have the mind of Christ? That is an incredible claim, but it determines everything about us and about our churches. Without this conviction we are vulnerable children exposed to a litany of lies.

The root of the problem is always in our thinking:

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature (1 Corinthians 14:20).

The Greek word for "discernment" or "judgment" occurs 19 times in 1 Corinthians in its various forms. Because the Corinthian believers rejected the premise that Paul's gospel revealed the mind of Christ, they lacked mature discernment (or judgment) in several related matters: the role of women in church meetings (11:13; 14:33-36); unworthy participation in the Lord's supper (11:27-32); church discipline in cases of sexual immorality (5:1-13); handling lawsuits between members (6:1-8); freedoms and constraints in eating with unbelievers (10:25-30); the place of tongues over against prophecy in the building of the church (14:13-25).

Discernment is thinking theologically about all of life, the antithesis of pragmatism.

Christian growth involves identifying our discernment gaps, the gap between our convictions and practice.

Unity

We have seen in the Corinthian case that their failure to discern the true knowledge of God in the gospel led to a fractured fellowship, characterised by tribalism.

From Ephesians 4, we know that Christian unity is based on the true knowledge of God and is the essential attribute of the mature church. This kind of unity is achieved by speaking the truth of God's word in love.

Cranmer was convinced that Christian fellowship could only be based on a common understanding of the gospel. Listen to his prayer for Christian unity from the service of Holy Communion:

Inspire continually the universal church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord: and grant that all they that do confess your holy name, may agree in the truth of your holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.

The church whose people are shaped by the same biblical truths will learn to love one another and so live together in peace. Yet, maintaining doctrinal unity is easier said than done.

Repentance

I'm told that, as we age, we become a caricature of ourselves. How true it is. It gets harder to repent from well-worn paths and thoughts. But, as Colossians 3 says, in Christ we are dead to our old way of life, so we "put off" sin and put on lots of attributes that embody love.

Archbishop Cranmer tirelessly called the English church to the necessity of repentance. He assured us that in the name of our Saviour Christ, our perpetual advocate and priest,

our offences [will] be continually washed and purged whensoever we, repenting truly, do return to him with our whole heart, steadfastly determining with ourselves, through his grace, to obey and serve him in keeping his commandments, and never to turn back again to sin.

Is this the way we live each day, turning wholeheartedly to obey and serve our Lord in all things and resolutely refusing to play around with sin?

Endurance

I imagine by now you are feeling just a little overwhelmed, like me! How in the world can I work at this kind of maturity?

Happily, our resources are not of this world. Listen to what Paul prayed for the churches in Colossae and Ephesus: "May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy"; "According to the riches of his glory may he grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being".

We are empowered by the risen, ascended King, seated at the right hand of God, the Lord, who will be with us always to the end of the age by his Spirit, the Lord who is ever interceding for us.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us a surprising perspective on endurance from the experience of Christ himself.

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:3-6).

In Calvin's writings on bearing our cross, he helps us see God's fatherly discipline through suffering, for our salvation and maturity.

Therefore, in the midst of the bitterness of tribulations, we should recognise the kindness and mercy of our Father toward us. For even in such tribulations, he doesn't cease to promote our salvation. Indeed, he afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us, but instead to deliver us from the condemnation of the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:32)

Yes, you read that correctly. Affliction of all kinds is heart-wrenching and terrifying, but it is God who afflicts us to promote our salvation.

Even Jesus, God's Son, learned obedience through what he suffered (Hebrews 5:8). The promise of Christ's presence, his faithful endurance of the cross and our Father's loving discipline, are powerful incentives for a life of prayer.

Thankfulness

Our natural instinct in facing hardship is to doubt God's goodness or even his knowledge of us. We misread what God is like and his intentions for us, rather than going back to the foundation of maturity, our certain knowledge of God in Christ.

Thankfulness is a constant learning process. No matter what is happening in life, these realities about the Father's grace toward us never change. He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:12-14).

We have come full circle. Being filled with the true knowledge of God, we can be thankful even when all hell (in a manner of speaking) breaks loose.

So, who are the really mature Christians in your church? What's the grid that we use to measure maturity? Always serving on rosters, hospitable, bold in evangelism, following up newcomers, committed to church life generally? Yes, these are some of the fruits of maturity. But let's be careful we don't focus on external activity and miss the heart of maturity, mistaking a dead faith for a lively faith. SC

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ASSESSING MATURITY

Here are some questions to ponder for us personally, and for our churches.

- To what extent have we stagnated in learning the knowledge of God, relying on earlier years?
- Do we make the most of learning through sermons and small groups by preparing and reviewing? Do we hear but not read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest?
- How could we make formal theological learning more desirable and accessible for all in our churches?
- Do new people from different backgrounds feel loved and welcomed in our church?
- What groups of people do we find hard to love as God has loved us?
- Do we discern when our thinking is being conformed to this world rather than to the perfect will of God?
- Are we interested in understanding the theological debates of history and our own times so that we avoid the same errors?
- What are some of our discernment gaps between our convictions and practice?
- Do we pray in repentance when the word of God confronts our ungodliness?
- When afflictions come, do we find ourselves moving toward God in thankfulness and faith, leaning on him, or distancing ourselves from God?

Rethinking contentment

The Bible's attitude to contentment is vastly different to that of the world around us – but this is the contentment we need to have, writes **Chris Thomson**.

Should Christians be content with their circumstances? Our first reaction might be "Of course!" After all, doesn't Scripture command contentment? But what does that mean?

Dictionaries typically define contentment as "happiness and satisfaction", so are we always supposed to be happy and satisfied with our circumstances? If so, what does contentment look like when you've just lost a child, or a parent? Or when you're struggling with a chronic illness or a difficult relationship?

It is useful to begin by considering our attitude to financial circumstances, because it is primarily here that Scripture uses the language of contentment, even if the *idea* is present elsewhere.

In 1 Tim 6:8 Paul speaks of contentment with food and covering (which may include both clothing and shelter). However, in Phil 4:11-12 he says that he has learned to be content even in hunger and poverty. This did not mean that Paul *felt* no hunger, and so we should we wary of supposing, for example, that contentment in illness involves not feeling pain, or that contentment in singleness involves not feeling or grieving the lack of a partner. No, Paul hungered, just as Jesus hungered after fasting for 40 days and yet refused to satisfy his hunger inappropriately. But even in hunger and poverty Paul endured "through him who gives me strength" (Phil 4:13).

Hebrews 13:5 charges people to "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'". In contrast to those who look to wealth for security and happiness, Christians are to trust in God's fatherly care, which is why Luke 12:22-34 follows Luke 12:13-21 (note the "therefore" in verse 22).

This does not mean that Christians will never be in need, for we are commanded to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" (Rom 12:13). Accordingly, "Be content!" is just as inappropriate a response to a brother or sister in financial hardship as is "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed" (see James 2:16). And the same is surely true of other needs and griefs; we are to "carry each other's burdens" and thereby "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

Sadly, although many of us have more than we need, brothers and sisters around the world still die of hunger or treatable diseases. Even then, however, God does not abandon his children but brings them through death into his presence, awaiting resurrection when Christ returns. Contentment does not, therefore, involve having no needs or cares, or being "happy and satisfied" with our finances, but rather trusting in God's care and provision and refraining from covetousness and sin (see Luke 3:14; 1 Tim 6:9-10).

Likewise, when it comes to our circumstances more generally, Scripture does not lead us to expect a pain-free life. Because of sin our world is "subjected to frustration," and so we "groan inwardly" (Rom 8:20, 23). Groaning is not an expression of happiness and satisfaction with our current situation, but of longing for the world to come when God will wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4).

Moreover, Christians follow a suffering saviour (Luke 9:23-24; 1 Pet 2:21), and so the Christian life is a cross-shaped one of sacrifice and suffering and self-denial. Scripture promises us many griefs and hardships in life (Acts 14:22), and divine grace does not dull the pain but rather enables us to endure (Rom 15:5). Failing to grasp this may lead to disappointment or doubt when suffering comes our way, or make us shy away from decisions that will involve hardship. Moreover, we need not feel guilty when we find life hard. As we see in Psalms, it's appropriate to cry to God in our pain.

Yet our hardships are temporary. Paul writes, "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor 4:17; see also Rom 8:18). Paul's "light and momentary troubles" included multiple imprisonments, floggings, beatings and shipwrecks, as well as sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, and constant danger from all sides (2 Cor 11:23-28).

His trust in God did not make him oblivious to the pain; he was "hard pressed" and "perplexed" (2 Cor 4:8), and wrote of his "great distress and anguish of heart" and "many tears" for the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:4). Yet he counted these troubles "light and momentary" in comparison to the glory to come. The biblical approach is not to deny the pain, but to keep it in perspective.

An eternal perspective enables us to redirect our longings: from longing for change in this world to longing for the world to come. The prayers "your kingdom come" (Matt 6:10) and "come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20) remind us that we are not supposed to be content with this world as it is.

As our bodies and minds deteriorate, rather than longing for the health of others or of our younger selves, we can long for the day when the perishable will be clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality (see 1 Cor 15:53). And when singleness is hard, seeing marriage as the solution can lead to disappointment, for we may not find a spouse, or may find marriage every bit as hard. Better, therefore, to turn that ache of loneliness or heartbreak into a longing for the world to come, when we will all be happily single (Luke 20:35-36) and enjoy the perfect relationship with God to which earthly marriage points (Rev 21:2-3).

Not only are our hardships temporary, but God gives us grace to endure them and even works through them. Paul writes: "Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor 12:7-9).

We don't know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. But he describes it as "a messenger of Satan" who, as we see in Job, puts pressure on God's people to entice them to sin. As Christians we can expect such trials. We need not pretend that they are good, and we may plead with the Lord to remove them, as Paul does. Yet God had a purpose in Paul's suffering, namely to keep him from conceit. And he has a purpose in your suffering and mine. It might not be revealed to us, as it was to Paul. But God allows suffering for a variety of reasons – for example, to refine our faith and glorify Christ (1 Pet 1:7), or to keep us dependent on God (2 Cor 1:9).

Notice that God did not answer Paul's prayer by removing the thorn, nor by removing the pain. Faith in Jesus is not an anaesthetic that allows us to undergo trials in a state of euphoric oblivion. Rather, God gave Paul grace to endure. And so, Paul boasts about his weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on – literally, dwell in – him. Finding life hard, therefore, is not in itself a sign of ungodly discontent. Even Paul, who had learned the secret of contentment, found life hard at times, and could plead with God for relief. But God allows difficult circumstances for a purpose, and grants strength and grace to endure.

Even in hardship Christians have much to rejoice in, and our hardships must not overshadow the blessings God has richly bestowed on us. He is our heavenly father. Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20), and we have an inheritance laid up for us there that will never perish, spoil or fade (1 Pet 1:4)!

No trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword can separate us from Christ's love (Rom 8:35). Thus Paul describes himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor 6:10), and we too are to "rejoice always" (1 Thess 5:16) and "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18).

This takes discipline, for when life is tough it is tempting to focus on the challenges and hardships that face us. As secular psychologists have recognised, gratitude journals and regular thanksgiving are invaluable for cultivating a positive attitude.

So, to return to the question posed at the start, should Christians be content with their circumstances? Not if that means always being happy and satisfied with our situation in this world, no matter how challenging. Rather, our happiness and satisfaction are rooted in our confident hope of the perfect world to come, in knowing God as our heavenly Father, in the many blessings we have from him, and in our trust that he cares for us and will provide what we need until he brings us safely to his heavenly kingdom.

Finding contentment outside our present circumstances helps us to focus less on ourselves and on this world, and more on the interests of others and on the world to come. Meanwhile we can serve one another in our hardships by bearing one another's burdens with practical care and emotional support, and allowing room for grief while also pointing one another to God and his promises.

Dr Chris Thomson lectures in Old Testament and Ministry at Moore College.

Take the fear out of evangelism

Phil Wheeler

I **WAS** GENUINELY SURPRISED BY A RECENT ENCOURAGing experience in personal evangelism. Surprised because it was with Sydneysiders of Muslim background during the month of Ramadan!

Some followers of Jesus from across Sydney, including a number working with Evangelism and New Churches, organised a "Peace Tent" in Lakemba. Each night a couple of pop-up cabanas were set up, decked out beautifully with cushions and low seating, as a coffee/chai lounge complete with low lighting, turkish delight and sweet dates.

After sunset during Ramadan, Lakemba's main street swells with thousands of people of all ages, mostly from Muslim-majority countries, coming to break their fast, catch up with family and friends and generally enjoy the evening. It is a carnival atmosphere – a Middle Eastern "Royal Easter Show", minus the showbags and with appreciably better food!

Thousands of revellers passed by the Peace Tent and hundreds came in to sit, have a cup of chai tea and a conversation about spiritual matters, faith, life and whatever was on their hearts.

There was expressly no politics, no arguments, no proving a point. Just listening, polite conversation, gentle inquiry and questions. The feedback was almost universally positive from those who came in, with many saying, "It was great to talk, thank you for welcoming me" and "We should do more of this" and one commenting, "This is the true spirit of Ramadan".

These were some of the easiest, most rewarding conversations about faith I have ever been part of. There is a place for robust conversation, for debating matters of eternal significance, for persuading people of the truth of salvation through Jesus, but rarely in the first conversation. This was about prayerful trust that God might bring people who are spiritually open into the Peace Tent to have a warm, peaceful conversation about belief, about Jesus the Prince of Peace and how he brings peace – between us and God, between people transformed by his word of grace and into our own hearts in the midst of the broken world we all inhabit.

Many visitors to the Peace Tent came from war-torn countries or places where hostility, violence and oppression are all too common. Many were very open to talking further, to being welcomed into someone's home, having a trusted follower of Jesus come to visit their home, or taking away reading material about the claims of Jesus.

Pray for these myriad of seeds sown and relationships started. Pray that many take the next step towards faith and life and find peace through Jesus.

There were many lessons learned from the Peace Tent. First, that the world is not secular, it is religious! There are thousands of people in our city who are very open to spiritual conversations and to a "Jesus" conversation. In all probability they will not have a Western/white face or cultural background. Stop believing the secular lie about the world and the dismissal of religion from the public square and everyday life.

Also, God answers our prayers. It should be no surprise that when we pray for God to draw interested and open people into our path, that he will answer that prayer, often in surprising ways. Especially when we couple that prayer with a well thought through, culturally appropriate, engaging event or space like the Peace Tent. Pray hard, plan well and then try something.

Be assured, you don't have to be an expert in other religions or cross-cultural communications to talk to people from other backgrounds about Jesus. One leader at the Peace Tent wisely said that, "The only Muslim you have to understand is the Muslim sitting opposite you". That is true not just in cross-cultural experiences of sharing Jesus but in any personal evangelism!

Remember that each person has a unique history, experience and understanding. They are a human being, not a box or a theoretical category.

Listen, ask questions, seek to explore and then, in time, respectfully bring the good news of Jesus and peace through him into the conversation. Share your story *after* hearing theirs. Most people want to be heard before being talked to.

Finally, relax. When you consciously remove the fear of getting into an argument, or getting out of your depth in some complex apologetic discussion and not knowing what to say, it is amazing how relaxed you can be in having a conversation about faith and Jesus.

When you know that this is not the time and place to "win" an argument or deliver that knockdown irrefutable answer, but rather to ask questions and to gently explore and probe, it is not that hard to have a meaningful conversation. You don't need a theological degree or an apologetics course. You don't have to have "all the answers".

Look for ways to extend a conversation and direct the person you are speaking with towards reading a gospel for themselves – ideally with you.

The Rev Phil Wheeler is the director of Evangelism and New Churches.

What kind of church do we want to be?

Mark Thompson

RECENT EVENTS HAVE REMINDED US HOW easy it is to be trapped in a subcultural bubble which obscures what is happening in the wider world. We can think we know what the thoughts and concerns of others are but, really, it is only our own immediate context that we know. Sometimes it takes a surprise election result to remind us that not everyone in the country is thinking the same thoughts!

It is just as easy for Christians to believe we already know what the wider community thinks. The story told repeatedly in the press and elsewhere is that Christianity is dying out, as is religion more generally. Australians have grown weary of the gospel message. They've heard it and they don't want a bar of it. The scandals of recent years have thoroughly discredited us and there is no way back. We hear of declining church attendances and assume that's the proof.

Our response to this story can often run in either of two directions.

Some will be convinced we need to soften or make the challenge of the Christian gospel more "nuanced", seeking some kind of accommodation with the dominant forces of the 21st century. That we should stop using the language we have been told is most offensive (while of course trying hard not to discard the truths this language was meant to convey). We should become culturally savvy Christians and concentrate more on intelligent cultural engagement.

Others will adopt a defensive mindset: the world won't listen, so let's protect what we have. We'll concentrate on refining the programs already in place, ensure these are sustainable and do what we can to stem the haemorrhage. Our focus needs to be more on the local congregation, building its sense of community and ensuring its integrity at every level.

On one level there is nothing wrong with Christian cultural engagement. It is good to keep working at bringing Christian perspectives to bear on issues in the public square. Nor is there anything wrong with strengthening the life and every-person ministry of the local congregation. The countercultural love within the Christian congregation, a love that reaches across the usual divides of age, gender and race, is a powerful testimony that God is at work among us.

Yet I'd like to suggest that this moment cries out for another response. We'd be foolish to pretend the changes and challenges of the moment are insignificant. They are real – but they are not all bad. I rejoice that we live in a time with greater accountability and a determination to protect the vulnerable, a greater awareness of our failure to respect the first nations of this land, the beautiful tapestry of cultural diversity that is a result of immigration, and technology that connects us wherever we are in the world. Yet more is going on.

When we take a global view the world is becoming *more* religious, not less, and Christianity continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. Yes, there has been a decline in the West, but the world is more than the West! Even here, while Census figures and other surveys show fewer Australians are willing to identify as Christian, every week men, women and children are still coming to faith. There is still a spiritual restlessness in many quarters.

The need is the same as it has always been. Men and women need to be introduced to Jesus, who knows everything about each of us – the darkest secret, the failures and insecurities – and still loves us beyond anything we could imagine. People still need to hear his invitation: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29). The message is still, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

I am not suggesting everyone is a "big E" evangelist. There are some people who are gifted well beyond the norm in this area. Nevertheless, those who have met with Jesus have never been able to remain silent about him. So our congregations ought to be full of men and women for whom evangelism is the natural response to this moment. If ever there was a time when the harvest was plentiful (Matt. 9:37) it is this one.

What kind of church do we want to be as we enter the third decade of the 21st century? What kind of Diocese do we want to be? My prayer is that, above all else, what energises us will be a concern to see men and women saved as they come to Jesus in repentance and faith.

I pray we will renew this priority in the training we do with each other, with the allocation of resources at the local and diocesan level, and in the activities we organise. We mustn't believe the lie that the gospel has been rejected by most Australians. The truth is that most Australians have never heard the gospel. And then there is the world.

The Rev Dr Mark Thompson is the principal of Moore Theological College and attends St Andrew's Cathedral, where he is thrilled about this year's Meeting Jesus events.

Soldier of the Lord reaches 100

IT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT those who reach their centenary receive a letter from the Queen. But that doesn't even scratch the surface of the official recognition Sydney clergyman the Rev Keith Marr received when he celebrated his 100th birthday on July 18.

In addition to the Queen's message and photograph, he received a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and a message of congratulations from Governor-General David Hurley and his wife Linda. Mr Marr also received letters from Archbishop Glenn Davies and previous archbishops of Sydney, Peter Jensen and Harry Goodhew.

Archbishop Welby sent his "prayers, good wishes and God's blessing" to Mr Marr and his wife Lola. He also gave thanks for the "extraordinary ministry you have exercised since your ordination" – 70 years ago this year.

In his letter, Archbishop Davies congratulated Mr Marr and added, "How good it must be to reflect on the Lord's goodness to you and your family over these many years".

The Rev Keith Marr, with his wife Lola, shows one of his cenentary greetings.

Mr Marr first applied to Moore College in 1938, but the outbreak of war the following year changed his immediate future and he joined the Army as a signalman in June 1940. He was captured by the Japanese in February 1942, in Singapore, and spent the remainder of the war in the notorious Changi prison camp.

In one of many short pieces he wrote in subsequent years for parish magazines and other publications, Mr Marr recalled his final Christmas as a prisoner of war in 1944:

The only joy that *Christmas brought was the only one that really mattered – the experience that, through dreadful days and sleepless nights, the one whose birth we were celebrating walked with us and his presence enabled us – in spite of all that was happening – to find peace and joy.*

After returning to Australia Mr Marr restarted his Moore College studies in 1946, even though he was physically weak:

I was still in hospital but felt that I could not waste another year. It meant that the following years were far from easy and there were times when medical advice was that I should give up studies, but I was more than ever sure of my call and I knew that I could not.

The old chapel at Moore College had in the east window a scroll with the text "My grace is sufficient for thee" and each day as I attended the morning service, the light shone on the window and illuminated those words and they would remind me that the one who called me was my source of strength.

The memories of those times when the presence of Christ was so real that it seemed he literally was walking beside me are still vivid. Just as real are the days when I knelt in the chapel and, reading those words "my grace is sufficient for you", could only reply, "I hope so Lord!"

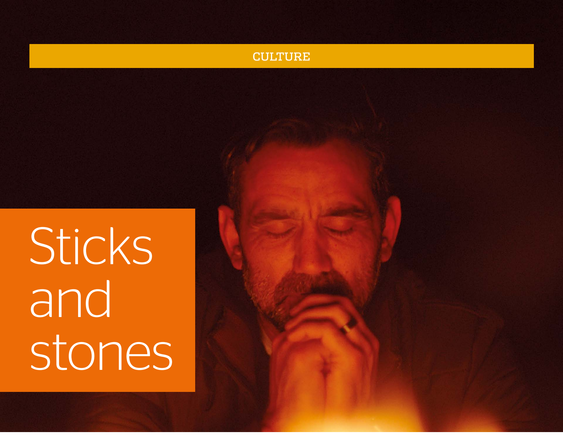
Mr Marr was ordained in 1949. Following curacies in Campsie and Wollongong he became a chaplain to the armed forces in 1951, at the same time as he moved to Dural. He spent five years in both roles, including seven months with the 28th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade during the Korean War.

After further service in the provisional parish of Bexley North, Mr Marr spent almost two decades (from 1962-1981) as a prison chaplain at Long Bay and Silverwater jails. In his final year of prison ministry, he received an OAM for services to religion – before serving for two years as rector of Millers Point prior to his official retirement.

In another piece reflecting on his life, Mr Marr wrote:

In this age, when our scientific knowledge tends to place us much more with the psalmist and his question, "What is man that thou art mindful of him" than with Jesus' statement "I know my sheep", it seems presumptuous to claim that God cares, or even knows the individual exists.

Yet, if only we took the trouble to examine the evidence we might well change our stance. As I look back over my life, I am convinced that in some wonderful way God does care about each one of us, and in the words of Paul, is "able to keep that which is committed unto him".



Sticks and stones

Judy Adamson

The Australian Dream
Rated: M likely
Some coarse language used

ALMOST EVERYONE HAS SOME EXPERIENCE OF BEING BULLIED AND BELITTLED, humiliated or mocked. For most of us there also comes a time when we've had enough of the names, the fights or the insinuating gossip, and we call it out. But what happens next? Worse name calling? Violence? Or a capacity to stand tall in the midst of the stones tossed our way from the glasshouse dwellers?

For people from ethnic minorities such experiences will be very familiar. But there is particular pain for people from our first nations – who were here long before the white man claimed this continent for Britain and declared the land on which they had lived for thousands of generations to be uninhabited.

The Australian Dream is painful to watch in places, but it should be required viewing – whether people think they understand the issues surrounding our indigenous peoples or not. Because however much we do know, we can always be better informed.

I already knew most of the story behind this powerful documentary, which was written by journalist Stan Grant, but I learned much more and became, at different moments, filled with anger and disgust, sorrow, pride, and immense frustration.

The person around whom *The Australian Dream* is built is retired Sydney Swans footballer Adam Goodes, whose career as one of the greats of AFL was probably shortened due to the appalling behaviour of spectators, internet trolls and the media.

The bulk of the film's footage concentrates on AFL, but in the end it is not about football, and it's not ultimately about Goodes. It's about Australia – now, in the past, and potentially in the future. It's about facing up to what our forebears really did to Aboriginal people, what day-to-day life is like for them now, and the tremendous hurt caused by a national holiday which, to them, celebrates when they and their culture were swept to one side.

Only since 1967 have they officially "counted" as being among the population of this country – and only now, 52 years later, has the Federal Government signalled its plans for a referendum to change the constitution and recognise our indigenous peoples properly.

Those before the camera in *The Australian Dream* include a range of indigenous AFL players and other prominent Aboriginal people such as Stan Grant and Federal MP Linda Burney. There are also non-indigenous coaches and journalists as well as Goodes' wife Natalie.

The film is also about humanity – something we all share. To paraphrase Galatians 3:28, in God's eyes there is neither male or female, Caucasian or Aboriginal: we are all his creation, and we are all one in Christ. So why don't we work harder to act this way?

As you watch, your heart breaks for Adam Goodes as he grapples with the abuse that follows him, for years, after he asks for a teenage fan of an opposing team to be removed from the football ground for calling him an ape.

Let's be frank: if you call someone an ape, it's meant to be an insult. Are players used to insults about their ball skills and playing ability? Absolutely. But should they have to endure personal insults? It happens frequently to indigenous people, and walking away time and again from such things is very hard.

Goodes grew up knowing nothing of his Aboriginal heritage because his Stolen Generations mum wouldn't speak about it, but that didn't stop the taunts at school because he looked different.

The "ape" jibe may not have been said because Goodes is Aboriginal. It may just have been a thoughtless insult. But that doesn't excuse it. We all need to learn to think and act better than this because, if we don't, the result is what Stan Grant calls "casual racism". And what is *heard* by indigenous people in those moments is that they are not welcome. Worse still, as Goodes stood up and called out the taunt, he committed the sin of being "the black man who complained".

Goodes was gracious afterwards, but the subsequent furore in the media and online very nearly crushed him, as Australia's underbelly was presented to the sun in all its glaring ugliness. Eventually, the one place Goodes had felt completely safe – the football field – became a place he didn't want to go.

I don't truly understand how this feels because I'm white. Goodes' own coach at the time, John Longmire, admits he couldn't understand it from within either. But he could see the impact it was having on his player. Regrettably, the bulk of the country missed it altogether, because they were too busy booing Goodes from the sidelines.

Therefore, the most crucial thing this film is able to do (much better, in my opinion, than recent documentary *The Final Quarter*) is to put the viewer inside the head of a number of indigenous people and help us see life from their perspective. It's painful, but necessary, for otherwise we may well not understand the need for change.

Commentator Andrew Bolt observes in the film that it wasn't him who dispossessed the Aboriginal people more than 200 years ago. Well, it wasn't me either. But does that absolve me, or anyone else, of responsibility to help clear up the mess our forebears made?

To leave support for our indigenous people to someone else, or ignore past trauma and violence – as well as ongoing racism and deprivation – without pushing for solutions, is to make ourselves part of the problem.

Our Aboriginal people are created in God's image, equal in humanity and soul to everyone else. If we see them as any less we put ourselves above God's word. And we do that at our peril.

See *The Australian Dream* if you possibly can. It may well sicken you in places. It may make you weep – as it did me. But it could also change you, and the way you think.

Mud and blood and tears

Judy Adamson

Danger Close: The Battle of Long Tan
Rated: likely M or MI5+
Coarse language, realistic war scenes

WHATEVER ONE MIGHT THINK OF THE VALIDITY OF FIGHTING THE WAR IN VIETNAM, this is a stunning back-to-basics movie about Australia's most pivotal battle of that conflict, fought in a rubber plantation at Long Tan.

The Australians and New Zealanders that fought and survived, or fought and died, were not given the public or private recognition they deserved for decades afterwards, even though the US President presented the combatants most involved, Delta Company of the 6th Battalion, with a Distinguished Unit Citation for their courage just two years later.

If you were to simply read the tale of August 18, 1966, it would be gripping and just a little terrifying. To even think about living through it, as the viewer does vicariously in this film, is to get a glimpse into why so many Vietnam veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

And we can't hide behind the idea of anonymous, faceless combatants here, as each soldier named in the film is – or was – a real person who was there on that day. Watching them face what seems like certain death, surrounded by a force more than 20 times their number, is like a punch in the gut. And then another one.

The central character of *Danger Close* is the leader of Delta Company, Major Harry Smith (Travis Fimmel), a hard-edged career soldier who is contemptuous of the discipline and skills of the young conscripted recruits, even though he's done his best to whip them into shape. Fimmel's portrayal is impressive, bringing off the difficult balance of steely jawed skill and sensitivity, particularly once the battle is joined.

When the VietCong are sighted in the area around Long Tan, B Company patrols the area overnight, with no problems. However, shortly after D Company relieves them, all hell breaks loose. They're separated and surrounded, vastly outnumbered and, before too long, running out of ammunition.

What they choose to do in a seemingly hopeless situation in the pouring rain, where even a moment's rest could cost them their lives, is what made the battle one for the history books.

While they fight to survive, commanding officers at the Army's task force base bicker over whether they themselves might be in danger if they send more men or ammunition to D Company. The soldiers in the field might be sacrificed or rescued. It's touch and go.

The cast includes a clutch of well-known faces such as Richard Roxburgh, Stephen Peacocke, Luke Bracey and Alexander England, directed with a sure hand by Kriv Stenders (*Wake in Fright*, *Red Dog*).

Danger Close can be bloody but it isn't filled with unnecessary gore, and certainly doesn't glorify war. It's about recognition of a moment in our history, as well as courage and friendship – and, happily, we know men from opposing sides have also met in friendship since that time. Fittingly, the credits roll to Redgum's classic song about Vietnam, *I Was Only 19*.