

fellow workers

news from around the presbyterian church of victoria

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PYV:
captured
by the gospel
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VICTORIAN FLOODS IMPACT OUR CHURCHES



The new Rochester Manse on 15th January. The garage soon flooded, but not the house!

Foreword from our Moderator

After a prolonged, harsh drought, with fervent prayers offered to God, we have received a watering of our land that has been described as a 'once in a hundred year flood!' This has caused hardship and loss for many on a scale hard to reckon.

The following is a compilation I have collected of the experiences of many of our rural folk. I thank them for sharing their stories.

Rt. Rev Andrew Bray

Rochester

Water everywhere – and none that can be used! It makes a stark contrast to the last 15 years of drought. After a week of steady and continuous rain (10/1-16/1) across much of the country one could not expect anything but floods. Eighty percent of the town flooded.

The church properties, whilst threatened (see above picture), were safe. Our service on 16th January was cancelled because there was no road access to Rochester on one hand nor could anyone reach the church without swimming. About six homes belonging to parishioners had water flowing through them. Others had

sheds and some water damage to homes. There are perhaps three families still dislocated and they will be for some time.

Many helped with cleanup, removal of carpets and so on. Short term needs have been provided, longer term needs depend on insurance outcomes. Farmers lost hay, with one farmer having his whole property inundated except for the home and dairy.

We look to the LORD for our comfort. 'But the mercy of LORD is from everlasting to everlasting.' Psalm 103:17

*Ian and Heather Brown
Minister Emeritus and wife*

Carisbrook

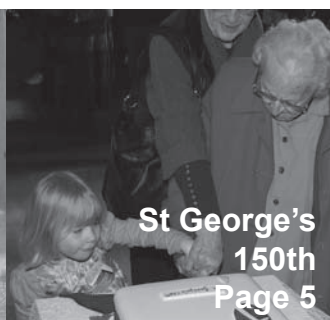
There was no time for preparation. The water came quickly and went quickly. Eighty-three percent of the town was flooded; only those on the hill were dry. Most had three feet of water through their houses and sheds. The church, manse and hall had water up to three feet deep, which meant that carpets, fridges, heaters—anything under the water-line—had to be tossed out, including some records and books.

As soon as people were allowed back into the town, Elder Shirley Turpin and her daughter, Heather,

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FW edition:
1 May 2011**

VICTORIAN FLOODS IMPACT OUR CHURCHES

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started the clean up, as they wanted to get back to 'normal' as soon as possible. It took every day with many willing hands to get the Church up and running by the next Sunday week. A short service was held (very emotional) and then a cuppa in the hall so that all could talk, not only to each other but to the Pastor.

The people need prayer in the short and long term. It has brought many people together, but it has also destroyed some families. Now everyone waits on receiving insurance payments. The days have been long and hard, listening to people. The phone has been going from early morning until late at night.

*John and Rosalie Gething
Home Missionary and wife*

Horsham

Horsham and district suffered relatively mildly. The river flowed at a fairly furious rate, but when it overflowed its banks it did not destroy everything in its path. The community had several days warning. At its peak – about midday, Tuesday 18th February – less than 50 houses were reported to have suffered. Some areas were evacuated as a precautionary measure, but most were able to return to their homes the next day or the day after. Several farmers' properties were water-logged, resulting in damage to crops.

The Presbyterian Church property was not in danger, and all the parishioners' homes also escaped harm. Three parishioners' homes (including the manse) were cut off by water flooding the street, but only one – an elderly gentleman – was evacuated, and he too was able to return two days later, finding his home secure.

After the peak, I spent four sessions at the 'recovery centre' where representatives of the Council, Centrelink, and the Salvation Army were helping flood victims, and the Horsham

ministers were taking shifts, being available to counsel anyone traumatized by the situation. Very few were 'traumatized' – most just came for a chat and to see if they might qualify for the government's offers of financial assistance.

One good outcome from the floods is that communities pulled together and helped each other – sand-bagging and the like. I heard from many that they had really got to know neighbours with whom they had previously only had 'a nodding acquaintance'.

God has again been gracious to the Horsham community – a fact which was publicly acknowledged in a worship service organised and conducted by members of the Ministers Association at the Sound Shell in Sawyer Park on Sunday 23rd February.

*Willem and Pam Vandenberg
Minister and wife*

Kaniva and Nhill

No property damage has occurred in the Kaniva and Nhill communities, but the effect of too much rain has been significant. Local farmers have been unable to harvest the 'abundant crop' of grain and legumes, and continual rain periods have down-graded the grain quality. This dashing of great hopes has led to depression and financial stress that, in some cases, has become unbearable after a prolonged drought.

The farmers are resilient and are often heard to comment, 'What can you do about it?' Nonetheless there is hurt and hardship not easily recognised when compared to the floods elsewhere. We celebrate God's goodness through all this and the call He has given those on the land to help feed the world!

*Ian and Janet Smith
Home Missionary and wife*

Kerang

There was adequate advance warning of the *slow flood* on

Kerang and surrounding districts, so much preparation was done in advance. There are kilometres of levee banks which helped the townsfolk, but the farming properties were mostly all under water.

The church properties were unaffected – thanks be to God! All main roads accessing Kerang have been and are still cut. Water is starting to slowly recede but the situation could easily escalate with any further heavy rainfall.

Keith & Fay Stanyer – Elder and wife

There was plenty of advance warning of waters approaching Kerang. However, we figured the water wouldn't get to us because we were some 25 kilometres from

‘We believed the water couldn't get to us. We were wrong! The water literally covered our farm.’

Kerang and not in the path of the water. We also believed we were protected by levees.

We were wrong! The water kept creeping towards us and because the levees next door are not well maintained, the water literally covered our farm. The cattle were initially trapped but, with help, we transported them to Barham, NSW. On Friday morning, we were given 20 minutes to evacuate. We are now staying at Koondrook. Kerang roads were completely cut-off in all directions. Some roads are still impassable. All the pasture and crops are a total wipe-off and now turning into smelly and rotting vegetation. The next 12 to 18 months will be tough, but we are resolved to get everything back in order.

*John & Barbara Pascoe
Session Clerk and wife*

Skipton

On Thursday 13th Jan I found out that Emu Creek might peak on Saturday, so we started doing some sandbagging. Everyone

Background picture: Street in Skipton, courtesy of Hui Lim



was quite hopeful that the town wouldn't be flooded again, because we were acting earlier and quicker. There was no official flood warning about Skipton. The situation soon changed, and more volunteers came to help out sandbagging around the houses, shops and creek. We now expected a big flood.

Friday 14th Jan. Skipton was already flooded in the morning. All our efforts from the day before seemed futile—the water was higher than the sandbag walls. Nine homes and eleven businesses went under water. At some points, the water level was more than 1.8 metres in the house.

Sunday 16th Jan. Water receded and the road re-opened. I was able to drive to Lismore for our 9am service. Skipton church, manse and members are not affected by the floods, and we are thankful to God for it. I have been going around and helping out in the clean up. It has been a great opportunity to work along with people who don't come to church. I am still visiting people affected by the floods.

Many of our church members have worked really hard in helping people affected by the floods. One of our elders was doing traffic control with the CFA, and couldn't go home on Friday night because the road back to his house was flooded. He stayed at the manse.

Please pray for wisdom and the right words to say as I mingle with those affected by the floods. It was great being a registered Community Chaplain; I was able to introduce myself freely to the Police, Relief Centre and other agencies. The Shire rang me to follow up on two families and I am keeping in touch with them. I commend our Health & Community Chaplaincy Committee for their wisdom in running the accreditation for Community Chaplaincy last year.

Hui and So Young Lim—Minister and wife

Swan Hill

The township of Swan Hill escaped the inundation that was expected, but the surrounding country was a sheet of water. There will be a total loss of pasture

and crops. The church property and manse were not threatened.

Keith and Fay Stanyer – Elder and wife

Pyramid Hill

On Saturday January 15th, a vast inland sea, reported to be 90 kms wide, was moving north and Pyramid Hill was in its path. By Sunday January 16th local knowledge estimated it would flood Pyramid Hill township to a depth of three feet.

Locals and strangers brought in their heavy excavators and willing volunteers appeared from nowhere and toiled to fill sandbags. Our church

had already informed our Minister that the roads were impassable and we planned to conduct our own service but this had to be cancelled.

At 1am Tuesday, the town's fire siren sounded and we heard a rush of heavy machinery and vehicles going past. A channel bank had burst and a torrent of water was surging towards the centre of town, flooding our yard on its way. In the dark of night the SES drove by telling us to evacuate immediately to the Memorial Hall and volunteers ran from house to house helping people to leave home. Our mobile phone also delivered a message to evacuate. We loaded our bags, already packed, and drove to family out of town.

Many rural properties suffered severe damage. Crops ready for harvest were destroyed and stored grain was damaged. Pastures

‘The fire siren sounded. A torrent of water was surging toward town, flooding our yard on its way.’

were ruined and fences smashed. Sheep drowned. Dairy cows in full milk had to be shifted through deep water and transported miles away, a horrific task for those involved.

Our son-in-law, daughter, grandson and his wife (faithful members of our church) are facing terrible loss due to crops not harvested.

Just when things were looking bleakest for those who suffered loss, the Department of Human Services, Centrelink, Red Cross

and others arrived to help. Townsfolk were delighted to receive a flying visit from our Premier of Victoria, Mr Ted Baillieu, who moved around and chatted to those

camping in the Hall. By the grace of God the levee banks had held. Skilled people with their mighty machines and other selfless volunteers had saved the town from destruction. People started returning and Pyramid Hill began to clean up. After the peak had passed, Fire Brigades arrived in from elsewhere, cleaned out the local swimming pool and washed out farm houses which had been flooded. It is reported that even “Elvis”, the bushfire helicopter, carried hay and fodder to stranded animals. Most of us in town have families for support but our farmers who have lost most will be the last to make their difficulties known.

We praise God from whom all blessings flow that no lives were lost and we earnestly pray that He will comfort and restore those who have sustained damage and loss.

*Linton and Val Mills
Elder and wife*

Continue to uphold God's people and the people of the affected communities in prayer, for it will take time to get their lives back in order. Please also pray for our Ministers, Home Missionaries, and church leaders as they seek to alleviate the physical, mental and spiritual issues of those to whom God has called them to minister.

Notwithstanding the devastation, there have been many testimonies of God's goodness from those I have spoken with – praise be to our great God.

‘Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.’ Psalms 124:8

Rt. Rev. Andrew Bray, PCV Moderator

Young people: captured by the gospel

PYV Summer Camp



It was a privilege to witness God at work on Summer Camp in December.

Both campers and leaders learnt and grew spiritually through the engaging and challenging messages that Andy May brought to us from Ephesians each day. It was wonderful for the study groups to explore the depths of God's grace, and to consider what it means to be truly 'captured' by the 'mystery' of the gospel in their every day lives.

Each session brought glory to God; it was inspiring to see so many musical, technical, creative, organisational and 'public speaking' gifts used in his service, and coordinated so effectively by Tia Wishart.



Camper Tim Fries tries to escape with the prized lightsaber!

Praise God, a camper dedicated her life to Christ during the 'How do I get to heaven?' workshop! It was a testimony to the presence of God that many campers chose to use some of their free time on New Years Eve to go to another workshop (or re-attend one they'd

already been to)! Praise God for Joe Dunning who did such an expert job of arranging the workshops.

The classic 'round robin' of outdoor activities was met with enthusiasm and great teamwork. On New Years Eve, all the performances in the Star Wars Film Challenge made for a memorable (and hilarious) evening where some amazing talent and 'Out of this World' creativity was displayed by campers and leaders! Another highlight of NYE was to hear everyone passionately praying in their groups just after midnight.

Praise God for answering our prayers and thank you to those who prayed for camp: 162 campers and 51 leaders attended.

The fifteen trainees (formerly known as 'interns') were in excellent hands with Nello Barbieri and Dean Carroll, and by all reports experienced great teaching, fellowship and growth.

Praise God that as children of God, we are one in Christ, and that Summer Camp was a testimony to that fact. Massive thanks to all those who gave of their time and energy to serve God on this camp.

Nic Bilyj

Summer Camp Convenor



Youth worker goes from camp to QLD flood zone

Three weeks on from the PYV Summer Camp, most of us have returned to our regular routines. The memories that were made will not be quickly forgotten. Will we carry memories of the messages and studies we heard? It was a message that was 'out of this world' and a message of grace that can transform life as we know it.

Recently our country has been hit by some of the worst natural disasters in Australia's history. From Northern Queensland down to Tasmania, even across to Western Australia, people have been hit by floods and bush fires. People have lost homes, possessions, and even loved ones. These people need shelter, food, clothing, and finances to rebuild their lives, but there is something more these people need: the gospel—that is, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I've been captured by this gospel, I've been captured by the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ. I don't have a whole lot of money or stuff that I can give people who have lost everything. But I have good health with two hands and two feet. I have the time and freedom to be able to go and help clean up their homes. Who knows, in doing that, I might get the chance to tell them why I'm there to help—because I've been captured by the gospel, that God loved me so much He sent His One and Only Son to die for me. For the month of February, I am offering my time and help to those in need in Queensland. I have no idea what adventures are ahead! But God has prepared this in advance, so I guess I shouldn't worry (but I do)!

19 Jan 2011

Peter Luu

Youth Worker

Burwood Community Presbyterian Church

What's happened to Peter since Jan? Find out at <http://qldflood.chromatix.com.au>



St George's Presbyterian Church in Geelong celebrates 150 years and the Reformation



102 year-old Miss Jean Rentoul cut the Anniversary Cake with the assistance of 3 year-old Isabella Henry

The 150th Anniversary of worship within our church was celebrated on July 4th, 2010. We were joined by the congregation of Scots, Geelong West, a daughter church of St. George's. Our senior minister, the Very Rev. Dr. Allan Harman, led the worship and we welcomed our preacher, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Rev. Robert Benn and his wife Laurel. Appropriately he spoke of our responsibility to obey the words of Jesus and continue to proclaim His name.

For the occasion, Drs. Allan and Mairi Harman wrote *Proclaiming the Faith*, a fine history of St. George's 1860–2010. All present received a complimentary copy.

Our second large function last year was one we host annually, the Reformation Service. It was appropriately held on the 450th anniversary of Luther's nailing of his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral. The church was packed by people from the reformed churches of Geelong to hear the Rev. Professor Douglas Milne, Principal of the Presbyterian Theological College, preach on the significance of the Reformation to Christian faith.

It was heartening to meet together for worship and a meal, particularly as there were so many young people and children present.

These two functions indicated that within the Presbyterian Church in Geelong is a vibrant Christianity as worshippers of our Lord and Saviour seek to take His message of salvation to a growing city.

Mrs Dorothy McNair

Preaching Seminar for Kilnoorat Presbytery

On Saturday 29th January, twenty-one men met in the Presbyterian Church Halls to complete a one day seminar on *Application in Preaching* presented by Dr Murray Capill. Dr Capill is the Principal of the Reformed Theological College in Geelong and he lectures in Pastoral and Practical theology. Dr Capill has just finished writing a book entitled *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* and is currently seeking a publisher.

Dr Capill alerted us as expository preachers to the danger of being lazy when it comes to application. He exhorted us to 'holistic application' in preaching: preaching the message as a whole, for the person as a whole, for life as a whole. We were encouraged to look at the text through four lenses:

1. The function of the word
 - What is the word asking us to do?
2. The faculties of the heart
 - Truth should come to the heart through the mind. It should affect the conscience and will even penetrate the deep passions.
3. The conditions of the soul
 - The souls of our listeners are in various conditions. Like the Puritans, we should be mindful of all these.
4. The reservoir of the preacher
 - The text is communicated to others through the reservoir of your own experiences. Live an enriched life. Keep listening and learning.

The day was a tremendous encouragement to lay and ordained preachers alike. The Warrnambool Church hosts three day seminars on preaching a year. The next two for 2011 are *Shaping an Expository Sermon* and then *Listening and learning from sermons* – a practical seminar.

Ben Johnson
Minister

Warrnambool Presbyterian Church

Rejoice! Commissioning at Ballarat North and Induction at Somerville

December 10th was a joyous occasion for the folks at Ballarat North Parish because they have a new Pastor to shepherd them. Pastor Ron Williamson was

commissioned by the Presbytery as Pastor of the Appointment Parish of Ballarat. May God continue to bless Ron and Jean and the congregations at Ballarat North for the extension of His Kingdom in Ballarat and beyond.

The Rev. A. Ken Brown was inducted into the pastoral charge of Somerville at a service held at Somerville on 11th February, amid rejoicing (that continued late into the evening!) by those at Somerville and the surrounding churches. May Ken and Gianna Brown and the Somerville congregation be richly blessed with wisdom, grace and joy as they seek to love and serve God and each other.

Various contributors

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A 'vacant' parish?



Newly ordained and inducted Travis Morony and family with the congregation at Mt Evelyn

Mt Evelyn Presbyterian was 'vacant' for two years and over this time, lessons of faith (or of God's faithfulness) were learnt. I would like to share some reflections that will hopefully encourage believers in churches that are contemplating being without a pastor or have been vacant for some time.

Mt Evelyn is a church of 40-50 people with three elders. Mark Crabb, wife Linda and their children, had been at Mt Evelyn for 10 years as an appointment. His ministry was gospel focused with a clear and distinctive call to be the people of God, living in the life gifted to us by the God of grace and mercy, and definitely not to rely on what we do, (that is even the good works we are called to do) to earn or keep favour with a righteous and holy God. Mark's determination was to preach nothing but Christ crucified; the power of God. I share these things because it is this precise emphasis that has provided a solid foundation for all that we as a church do or attempt to do. In other words, the church did not have to do or be anything other than the people of God week

in and week out: a fellowship of forgiven people, a community of those living in the goodness and greatness of the Father who does all things well, and a community praying to the Father for all things according to His will.

I would like to share some defining moments, both personal and from our congregation from the

┌ 'We looked to the Lord
to provide for us and
found that he did.' ┐

past two years. As an elder, it is humbling to lead and shepherd a group of people who know the God of grace and what He has done for His people in His Son and in the power of His Spirit. I was not sure what the response of the congregation would be when I announced the news that Mark was leaving Mt Evelyn. Mark and his family were very much loved by the congregation and together we had endured hardship for the sake of the gospel throughout the church's recent history with some very destabilising issues. But to my relief, while Mark

would be greatly missed, there was a sense that Mark's leaving would mean that others would now have the opportunity to be built up and strengthened in the gospel, a particular delight as the church that Mark was going to had been vacant for many years. The other comment made at the time was that if it was God's will that Mark be led somewhere else, then who are we to stand in the way? At this point I was struck by the generosity and maturity of the congregation to let Mark go and not cling as one would expect might happen in this sort of situation.

Having said this, it took a few months for the church to experience that God sustains his people, feeds them, answers prayer and provides preachers each week. We also saw that the elders could lead, guide and grow while the church was 'vacant'. Meeting together became ever more a joy as we looked to the Lord to provide for us and found that he did. If this was the only area of growth over the two years—that is, to find that God is the all-sufficient one—then this would be more than enough.



Another defining moment for me was when I had opportunity to work fewer hours in my paid employment. I had been wondering what else I could do but felt the inner conviction to not overlook the local church for other Christian interests that might be more exciting. I felt the Lord impressing on me His love for His church 'as it is': a relatively small and insignificant church by some standards. The work was to look after and take care of the local believers, those for whom Christ had died and loved so dearly. Leading, nurturing, guiding, and spending time serving the local church seemed to be a clear direction for me with the timely provision of being able to reduce my hours at work. At the time, I found myself wondering what the church is to 'be' under the headship and Lordship of Christ, and particularly how to think about the church without a pastor. Was the church to merely maintain itself or was it to grow? Was I to maintain myself—just go limping on in maintenance mode hoping for a pastor to replace Mark—or was I to step up and step out to do what was needed?

With renewed strength (even in the usual tiredness of life) we got on with being the church in this time and place, rather than putting things on hold and waiting. Let me share some of the things that stuck out for me.

There was a need to start a new study group so I took this on, not feeling necessarily gifted, but with a sense that God would open up His word to His people and feed them, and boy, did he ever. Despite my lack of energy and preparation, that small group had some wonderful truths brought home on a subject not often tackled in depth: death and dying. Another elder continued on with the oversight of providing music that reflected the importance of Christ's work for us, and so made

sure we would be encouraged in what we sang. Although this was tiring for him, he stayed committed to maintaining the integrity of what the people of God at Mt Evelyn were to sing. This was of tremendous encouragement as we met together and God blessed and built us up through this ministry.

┌ 'Would I step up to do
what was needed?' ┐

When Mark left we were considering electing new elders. After a while, we went through to elect one new elder, a significant event in the life of any church. This elder was keen to preach, an added bonus in the task of filling the pulpit every week. Over the course of the two years we had two substantial periods of part time pastoral ministry thanks to contacts from our interim moderator (Matt James). Both were part time lecturers at BCV in Lilydale, both were the right men for the job and both became much loved and appreciated by the congregation.

We had four funerals over this time which the church had to respond to, caring for those who were mourning, and presenting a gospel witness to family members. The realities of death, resurrection and eternity had to be lived out before a watching world.

While we didn't have many children, we had enough to re-start a Sunday school that could respond to the needs of children when and if they came. At the suggestion of some grandparents who brought along their grandchildren and with the oversight of our third elder, we started something that was flexible and not too burdensome on the few Sunday school teachers.

We wanted to use the

resource of our vacant manse for the Kingdom of God and prayed to this end. The manse was used for 6 months by an interstate pastor who was on a sabbatical; Mt Evelyn was just the right place for him and his young family. It was later used by a newly wedded couple for some months.

The calling of a new pastor was undertaken and after a lengthy process, Travis Moroney was ordained and inducted on 30th January 2011. And so what next? The Lord knows.

Can a church really be vacant? Not when there is a group of believers who gather together and bear witness to the gospel—the good news of sins forgiven in the Cross of Christ. Not when we consider Christ, who is the bridegroom and head of the church, who holds everything together for the church, in whom all the fullness of God dwells and who has given his fullness to His body. Consider Colossians 1 and 2. The church can never be vacant, or lacking. Praise the Lord for his faithfulness.


Peter Fairbanks

Elder, Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Church

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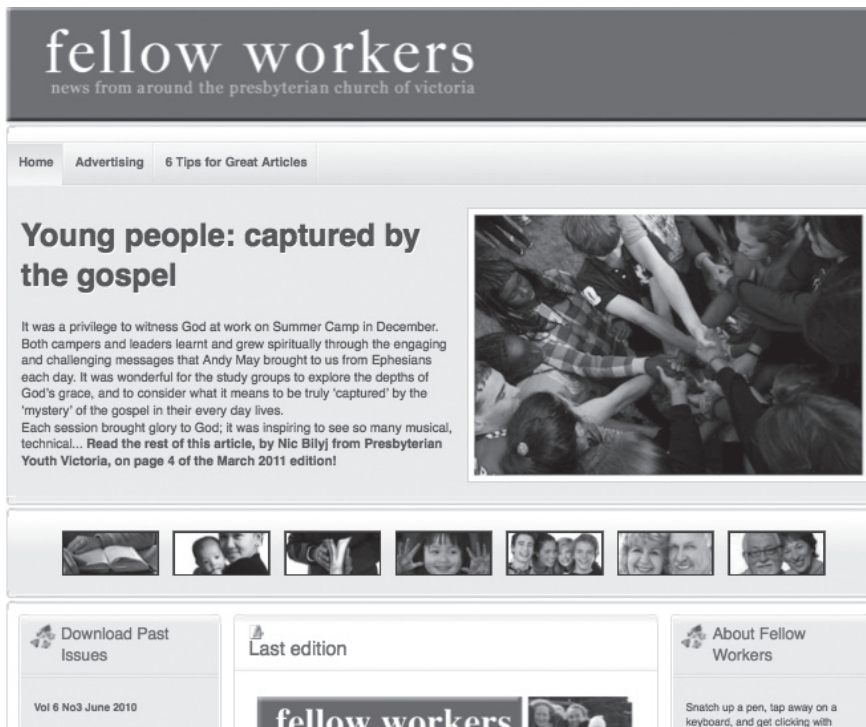
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news from around the presbyterian church of victoria

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Young people: captured by the gospel

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Mayfield Presbyterian celebrates 150 years

Mayfield Presbyterian Church, Mernda, will be celebrating 150 years of worship in this district. There will be a special celebration service on 27th March 2011 at 2.00 pm with afternoon tea to follow. Guest speaker is Rev. Andrew Bray. Past ministers, members and friends are warmly invited to attend and bring memorabilia and photos if you have any. Enquiries - Bev Hawke (03) 9716 2255.

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