



# FELLOW WORKERS



## ***CHRIST & CULTURE***

*Surviving the Dark Age*

*Silence: No Easy Answers Here*



# FELLOW WORKERS

Winter 2017 • Presbyterian Church of Victoria

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### Fellow Workers

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State News Committee: Luke Isham (convener),

Neil Harvey, Phil Betts, Tony Zirngast

Print Editor: Chiara Bilyj

Online Editor: Luke Isham

Sub-editing: John Ballantyne

Design: Shiloh Longbottom

Photography: Dave Assender, Matt Duke

Submissions, 'Ministry Moves' & Address Changes

*ed.fellowworkers@gmail.com*

PO Box 985

Horsham VIC 3402

Unsolicited book reviews or opinion pieces

*fwsubmissions@pcv.org.au*

PO Box 985

Horsham VIC 3402

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**Correction** In the Autumn 2017 edition, in the 'Ministry Moves' column, we incorrectly noted the new church planter in Officer as Mr David Martin, when in fact the Rev David Martin.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

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Chiara Bilyj

**B**e warned. There are words among these pages that may move you. Opportunities surround you to serve Jesus, our Creator and Saviour. I urge you to grasp some that you discover within these pages!

Get your church involved in celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (John Wilson provides ideas and resources on page 19). Contact Presbyterian Youth Victoria and apply to become a leader - play a part in drawing teenagers to faith in Christ! Let yourself be stirred to new action by the stories of Andy Buchan, Isabel Bell and Dave Martin. Could you join a church plant and throw your talents in for God to use? Fall to your knees in prayer for Christians experiencing persecution when you read of the pastors who have been abducted in Malaysia.

We live in exciting days, with new churches being planted among us, growing and thriving by God's grace. Yet we live in dark days (as Stephen McAlpine's book review notes), with persecution closing in and freedoms and morals eroding around us. But has the world not ever been so? Is not God still on his throne, with Jesus seated at his right hand? I pray that you will be encouraged as you read of our churches boldly taking the gospel into their



*Chiara and her husband Nicolaus are members of Heathmont Presbyterian Church. They have three children, Sapphire (6), Jonas (4) and Ariana (1) and this year are blessed to be expecting the arrival of two more - identical twins!*

communities, and our missionaries in Australia and round the planet.

This is my final edition as editor of *Fellow Workers*. I am thankful that I was given this opportunity to encourage and inspire the church that I love through this magazine. I want to thank the State News Committee, and especially the past convener Neil Harvey, and more recently, Luke Isham, for their partnership in this ministry. I pray that it will continue to bless and serve the people of the PCV.

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always, even to the very end of the age.

*Chiara Bilyj has been the editor of Fellow Workers since 2009.*

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## PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

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### REACHING THE WORLD THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

**T**he PTC in Melbourne exists to equip students as leaders, teachers, preachers, pastoral workers, missionaries and chaplains in the Christian church. Wonderful things are happening here at the College, and instead of keeping this to ourselves, we want to share God's goodness with the wider community!

Through our increased communication on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, the College is able to reach a wide variety of people, increasing their awareness of the PTC and what we do. While training ministers for ordination is a key focus, through social media we can more effectively broadcast our other opportunities such as short courses, confer-

ences and guest speakers.

Daily posts about College life, upcoming events, and recent publications engage our community of students and staff, whilst reaching the wider church and beyond with our mission.

We have been encouraged by the positive response to our presence on social media, and want to thank the church community for their support. We pray that we can continue to use the technology available to us for the glory of God and the preaching of the Gospel.

*Lucy Owen is the Administrative Officer of the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.*



# Partnership



2017 #2

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN PRESBYTERIAN WORLD MISSION

[www.apwm.org.au](http://www.apwm.org.au) • 81 Shaftesbury Road, Burwood NSW 2134 • (02) 8073 7490 • [national@apwm.org.au](mailto:national@apwm.org.au)

*The Australian Presbyterian World Mission exists to glorify God by facilitating the spread of the gospel to people overseas and Aborigines within Australia.*

## God is Clearly at Work in Her!

*How does a parent respond when their child becomes a missionary?*

Abby Williams is one of the youngest missionaries currently serving with APWM. She left Australia at the beginning of 2016, at just 19 years of age, to work with OM Ships, on the *Logos Hope*. Since then, the *Logos Hope* has sailed around Africa from east to west, around the Canary Islands, and across the Atlantic to reach South America. At sea, and in ports along the way, the ship's crew have worked hard to share the good news of Jesus with all the people they meet.

When Abby left Australia, her parents, Gary and Debbie, promised they would try to visit her about halfway through her two-year term. Crew members on the *Logos Hope* get seven days of leave per year. This gives them a chance to go ashore, get away from the ship and the crowds for a while, and have a little breather. Abby's parents hoped to meet her while she was taking shore leave.

The family were reunited in December in Barcelona, at the intersection of flying routes from Australia and the Canary Islands. Here they had a "catch-up" holiday, before travelling back to Tenerife for a few days together on board the ship. Gary and Debbie met Abby's friends, experienced some of her daily routines and saw some of the ministry work done by the crew.

Gary told us what it's like to be a parent sending their teenage daughter half way across the world to share the good news of Jesus. He said that the first-hand experience on board the *Logos Hope* was a great encouragement. Debbie had served on the *Doulos* 25 years ago, so they knew that their daughter was in good hands, but they were even more convinced of this after being on the ship for a few days.



ABBY WILLIAMS WITH HER MOTHER, DEBBIE

"It was such an encouragement to see what she's involved in," said Gary. "To see how she is growing in her faith, and in maturity and confidence and skill! She's still our beloved Abby – full of fun, grace, joy, energy, smileys and exclamation marks – but God is clearly at work in and through her. As a parent, it's sheer delight to see."

"The God-centred culture on the *Logos Hope* was palpable, the competence of the leadership was obvious, and it was a joy to be on board for a few days. The cultural experience of all the nationalities represented on board is amazing, and seeing it all come together because of people's shared faith in God and desire to be obedient to his call is awesome! Nobody seems to have a surname on board – with 400 people from 60 countries, it's 'Abby from Australia' or 'Gunter from Germany' or 'Manuel from Cuba' or 'Alice from Malaysia' – we met Abby's lovely friends, and it was like some kind of happy United Nations thing!"

Debbie and Gary are deeply grateful to supporters who have contributed in some way to sending Abby out into this mission field. Gary said, "Speaking as parents, it

amazes us that our daughter can get this wonderful two-year adventure with God, with hundreds of Christians from around the world, while also having an impact in the ports she visits by being able to share her faith and demonstrate the love of God to people everywhere."

While Debbie and Gary are thrilled with the way God is working in their daughter while she's a part of this mission work, they also see the bigger picture. "The reason the *Logos Hope* exists", said Gary, "is for the people ashore in the ports where the ship docks, people who need to hear of God's love for them. Six million people have visited the *Logos Hope* in recent years! The experience that Abby enjoys, and the personal enrichment that is taking place for her, is really a by-product of this work."

APWM partners with OM Ships and many other mission agencies to send out people of all ages into a mission field that is ripe for harvest. You can find out more about this work by visiting our website [apwm.org.au](http://apwm.org.au), or by contacting our National Office by phone ((02) 8073 7490) or email [national@apwm.org.au](mailto:national@apwm.org.au)

“

AFTER THIS I LOOKED AND THERE BEFORE ME WAS A GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO ONE COULD COUNT, FROM EVERY NATION, TRIBE, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE, STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE AND IN FRONT OF THE LAMB. (REVELATION 7:9)

”

# UPDATES

A number of new missionaries have recently joined the APWM family.

**Heather Barr** (Cowra, NSW, APWM Associate, Zimbabwe)



HEATHER BARR

Heather is bound for Harare, Zimbabwe, where she will serve with the denomination Central Church Africa Presbyterian. She will be assisting in re-establishing the Christian Education for the Harare Synod and leading women's Bible studies.

**Matthew & Louise George** (Ashfield, NSW, European Christian Mission, Australia)

After a number of years serving in Portugal, Matt and Louise have recently returned to Australia so that Matt can serve as the National Director for European Christian Mission.



MATTHEW & LOUISE GEORGE

**Robert & Jenni Alley** (Taree, NSW, Australian Indigenous Ministries, Australia)



ROB & JENNI ALLEY

Robert and Jenni have been serving with AIM for a number of years, often leading groups on field trips to AIM centres and mobilising people for Indigenous ministry.

## Nuer Bibles

Through the generosity of PresAID donors, Clayton Presbyterian Church and other partners, APWM recently sent 3,000 Bibles to Motor Yat for use in the South Sudanese Refugee camps in Ethiopia.

Motor writes "I received Bibles that were purchased from The Bible Society of Ethiopia, and straight away we hired a truck to transport the Bibles to Gambella than Kule refugee camps. The Scripture was a precious gift to those Christians who lost their Bibles because of the war in South Sudan, many houses were burnt to dust, and people lost all their belongings. The gift of a Bible was excellent, and

many people appreciated this treasure in their hands again. ...People came and carried their gifts on their heads. The women were jubilant as they carried the Bibles to their churches.

Pastor Daniel Gatluak Mark passed a word of thanks and encouragement to all who gave a donation for the purchase of the Nuer Bibles. "We received the Bible and it was free, may our God bless your work, we had not received a gift like this for a long time."



JOY AS THE NUER BIBLES ARRIVE

**John & Kara Dekker: A Daughter!**



JOHN & KARA DEKKER

We rejoice with John and Kara Dekker following the birth of their daughter, Eden, in March. John recently submitted a draft of his PhD thesis. The Dekkers will be in Australia and the USA later in the year for Home Assignment. During that time Ian and Pat Hart from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland will serve at Talua in their place.

**Rick & Kayleen Manton** (Mount Druitt Indigenous Church, NSW, APWM National)

Rick & Kayleen write "We've been at Mount Druitt for almost 20 years now, and we've decided this is the right time to move on to another ministry. This was a hard decision to make. The news has been shared with the Mount Druitt congregation, so now it's time to tell people who have supported us over the years.

We'll take up other ministry options that make use of our gifts. At this stage we don't know where that will be. This is something we are talking to APWM and praying about.

Please pray for our future direction, that we might know what the Lord wants us to



RICK & KAYLEEN MANTON

do for next year. And also pray for someone to succeed us in the important ministry at Mount Druitt."

## Mount Magnet

Andrew Letcher, CEO of Presbyterian Inland Mission, recently preached at Mount Magnet and later wrote "A joy to preach the Gospel in Mt Magnet this morning. Sobering to remember that, in all likelihood, the Good News was not being proclaimed anywhere else for two or three hundred kilometres, in most directions.



SURENDRA WESLEY

Praise the Lord that His people in Mt Magnet are salt and light, in an area with very little Christian witness."

**Nathan & Tomoko Stewart**

We rejoice with Nathan and Tomoko Stewart that they have commenced ministry in Japan. Thank you to those who have joined their partnership team.



NATHAN & TOMOKO STEWART

Please pray for them as they settle into life in Osaka as a family and for Nathan as he commences language study.

**Vijai & Suchitra Tagore**

One of the most effective ways that we can assist our Partner Churches is through training nationals to train others. In 2012-2013, Vijai Tagore, the New Testament lecturer at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehradun India, studied for his Master's degree at Christ College. Vijai and his family will be returning to Christ College from 2019-2021 to enable him to undertake Doctoral studies. If you would like to join the support team for this ministry then please contact us.



VIJAI & SUCHITRA TAGORE

# Cargo Cult to Christ

PHOTO: TOM RICHARDS



Sheryl Sarkoezy

The island of Tanna, Vanuatu, has a long history of Christian ministry. But for nearly 60 years from the 1930s, leaders of the Jon Frum cargo cult fiercely resisted any attempt to preach the Christian gospel among their members.

Cargo cults are usually seen among people of an animistic background who've had some contact with Westerners and the material goods that they bring into the culture. The desire to get Western goods – the “cargo” – is expressed through following a cultic figure who will one day return to the community, bringing with him material possessions for all. On Tanna, this cultic figure is the mysterious “Jon Frum”.

Along with a desire for cargo, the community might also feel a complex resistance against colonial power, coupled with hope for the creation of a new world. And there may also be a disillusionment with Christianity. On Tanna, stories of Christians being chased from villages, by Jon Frum followers wielding machetes, were not uncommon!

All that began to change in the late 1990s, because of the commitment of Maliwan, a young Christian man, and a series of dramatic events.

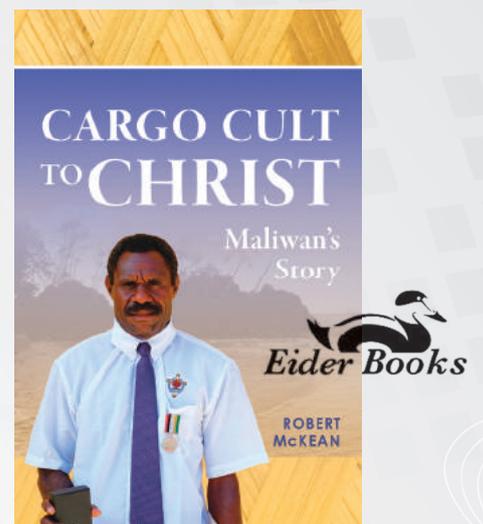
Maliwan arrived at the Talua Ministry Training Centre, on the island of Santo, in 1995. There he came to a firm faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, applying himself to studying the Bible and asking questions in class that other students seemed afraid to ask. At the end of his studies, he returned to Tanna, to preach the gospel in

his own village – among people who were followers of the Jon Frum cargo cult. Maliwan's message to his people was unwelcome, and he endured many difficulties for the sake of the gospel, but he could not be forced out of his home village.

A few years later stories began to spread across Vanuatu about amazing changes happening amongst the Jon Frum people and stories of a new openness to hearing the Christian message. Robert McKean, who had served as a missionary to Vanuatu when Maliwan was a student, also heard these stories. His connection with Talua, along with his knowledge of Bislama (Vanuatu pidgin English) and his experience of Vanuatu culture, made him the right person to write about Maliwan and the Jon Frum people.

Robert's book, *Cargo Cult to Christ*, is now completed, and will be launched on the island of Tanna in July this year. The book is the result of a slow process of collecting recordings of conversations and copying newspaper articles, of translating the material and sifting through it to uncover the full story of Maliwan and his family and the work of God on Tanna. Robert has drawn on many resources, but says, “I've relied greatly on Maliwan's own recollections and interpretation of the events following his return to Tanna after studying at Talua. The book is very much “Maliwan's story” – the story of a proud young cargo cult adherent who became a humble but bold follower of Jesus Christ.”

Today the cult of Jon Frum is still followed on Tanna. Every year the community celebrates “Jon Frum Day”, marching in



special clothing and raising an American flag. The community is less exclusive than in the past, but now syncretism with other religious ideas is common. The door that was once shut tight – and in some cases guarded with machetes – is now open, but those sharing the Christian gospel still face challenges and opposition. Robert says, “I hope and pray that when you read this book you'll give thanks to God for what has been accomplished in and through Maliwan, and that you'll pray for more people on Tanna to hear the message of freedom in Christ.”

Robert's book will be available to purchase from Paul Cooper's group at Eider Books. Eider Books are committed to facilitating authors to self-publish Christian books by providing comprehensive services that include editing, proof reading, design, illustration and printing. Contact via email: [eiderpress@gmail.com](mailto:eiderpress@gmail.com)





# ON TRACK

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN INLAND MISSION

ISSUE 2 2017

PROCLAIMING THE LORD JESUS CHRIST  
BY WORD AND DEED

## MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY ON THE MURRAY

Colin and Alison Morrow write:

*It is a great blessing when we see God combine both positions of the P.I.M. Patrol Team and Colin as Home Missionary of Sunraysia Presbyterian Church.*

*The greater Mildura area is a microcosm of multicultural Australia and we have many people from nations all around the world struggling to make a living or studying at the La Trobe University campus in the district. In particular there are people from the Pacific Islands who originally came to Australia to work on properties (vineyards and orchards) doing work which is not undertaken by other Australians.*

*We have come to know many people from the Cook Islands and they started attending Sunraysia Presbyterian Church some time ago but last November the Church Session launched, at the request of our Cook Islanders, a service in the Cook Islands language. This has effectively more than doubled the number of*



*Worshipping together*

*people coming along to join in worship. The combined numbers on a Sunday morning now range between 50 to 80 people, this includes children (sometimes it has been a struggle in our Sunday School building to fit them all in!).*

*To assist our Cook Islands brothers and sisters in developing their outreach within their community in the broader Mildura area, by the grace of God, Sunraysia was able to be a beneficiary of trust funds to purchase a small 13 seater bus to transport some of them to and from worship services. What a blessing! Already, though, the bus is too small – it has to do two trips to bring people to and from the Sunday services.*

*Amongst these folk are a couple, Nio and Matapi Teopenga, who are undertaking distance study from the Cook Island Christian Church theological college (an independent denomination) in Rarotonga. They will be graduating this year and have invited "Papa" Colin and "Mama" Alison to go to Rarotonga to witness this great*

*occasion. Another blessing and honour! We look forward to going in July and encouraging the work of the gospel in those Islands as they too have been an encouragement to us in our work here.*

*Overall God is humbling us and showing us that He is building His church by His grace and to His glory. He uses the meagre efforts we put in to do wondrous things.*

*Like His Son so many years ago on the hills of Galilee who was given a lunch by the small boy and multiplied loaves and fish to His glory, so we are seeing Him doing it again with people in Mildura, the Sunraysia region, the Mungo Patrol and beyond.*

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow!*

*Colin & Alison Morrow,  
Mungo Patrol Team*

*Colin and Alison Morrow serve part-time with PIM, in the Mungo Patrol Area and part-time at Sunraysia Presbyterian Church (Mildura, Vic), where Colin is the Home missionary.*



*Brothers in the Lord*

## A NEW SEASON ON PATROL

David and Gae McDonald write:

*After relocating from South Australia, we are excited to be in a new area. To help us begin to learn about our new area, we carried out a short patrol. These are some of the things we discovered along the way.*

*God is still faithful in orchestrating our patrol to draw us to the right people; country people are still friendly on the whole; there are more trees/less sand dunes than in SA and the distance between stations is a lot shorter. We were also pleased that, just as we had found in SA, the previous PIM Patrol Team in the area, Steven and Rosalie Goldsmith have left people with a positive attitude toward PIM.*

*We were reminded that the influence of the church is very limited with few regular Gospel centred ministries in the small outback towns. One Sunday morning we attended the Brewarrina Anglican Church. We had come expecting to attend the advertised weekly service. On arrival we discovered that services were now monthly, but in the grace of God we had arrived on the right Sunday. There was a small congregation, with connections to outlying stations. Afterwards we were invited to another*



Church in the bush

*service, this time in the tennis shed at Weilmoringle. The shed doubled as a stable for wild horses. So with a dirt floor, no flowers, keyboard, pews, stained windows, plaques, notice sheets or formal communion table, we came together to worship the Lord. It was attended by the only full-time school teacher and most of the local station people with the rest joining for a lunch that went until 6.30pm; we made many connections and many 'salty' conversations.*

*The local school is attended by 14 children*

*(mostly aboriginal). The headmistress (and only full-time teacher) is keen for us to conduct some RE and be able to connect with the other small schools in the area. Praise God!*

*While the geography of the Darling Patrol is different, the need for people to know Christ personally, the lack of outreach in the bush and the awesome message of salvation is still the same. We thank God for the new challenge and pray that we will be faithful representatives to His flock; lost or otherwise.*

## ORIENTATION TRIP FOR NEW PIM PADRE KIM JAEGER

The road was narrow and windy, as it snaked its way through tiny farming hamlets. As we passed by, people stopped what they were doing, looked up, smiled and waved to us.

Though we were only about an hour or so from Hobart, this section of Tasmania's Midlands area had a real sense of isolation. Small farming communities, few visitors

and no mobile phone coverage conveyed a sense of remoteness, even though we were not that far from the capital city – at least in mainland terms we weren't that far.

We could find scant evidence of active churches or Christian witness. We found many old, dormant and abandoned church buildings – but we struggled to find anything alive.

This journey was part of an orientation trip for new PIM Padre Kim Jaeger. The trip had taken us from the Jaegers' home in Hobart, up the rugged West Coast to the NW tip of Tasmania. We had then turned Eastward for a visit to Stanley and worked our way back to Hobart through the Midlands area. Our aim was to further develop our understanding of the area, to make some contacts and to begin planning for Kim's new patrol ministry.

Andrew Letcher

*A couple of swagmen set up camp*



Kim Jaeger on Patrol



## NEWS AND UPDATES



*The McDonalds' commissioning at Narrabri*

### Commissioning at Narrabri

The congregation of St Stephens Presbyterian Church in Narrabri (NSW), along with local and interstate visitors joined together in February to commission David and Gae McDonald into Patrol Ministry in NW NSW.

\* \* \*

### The Presbytery of Bass (Tas)

PIM CEO Andrew Letcher and new Padre Kim Jaeger enjoyed sharing and discussing the Tasmanian ministry with members of Presbytery in February. They are looking forward to working together in the years ahead.

\* \* \*

### Health challenges

Several PIM Teams have experienced health challenges in recent months.

Please pray for speedy recoveries from surgery, and illness.

\* \* \*

### New workers needed

We have some great Gospel opportunities in PIM, but we need some

new teams to join us. Please pray with us that the Lord of the Harvest will raise up more workers for His harvest field.

\* \* \*

The PIM office still has copies of *Views Beyond the Furthest Fences*, the attractively presented coffee table book that tells the story of PIM and AIM. To order your copy, please contact Mike Timmins in the PIM office.



*Kim Jaeger sharing with the Presbytery of Bass*

## WANDERING AROUND WITH ANDREW LETCHER



*Andrew Letcher*

Sometimes it is so hot that Patrol ministry in remote places becomes unsafe. Sometimes it is so wet that it becomes impossible. In our re-launched ministry in Tasmania, it is probable that snow will sometimes close roads and disrupt plans.

Like the rest of life, Patrol plans can change quickly. But the Gospel never changes. God's plan for the salvation of people never changes. When God makes a plan He sticks to it and follows it through, despite the problems and challenges along the way.

PIM Teams are regularly reminded of God's control over things in life. Often, a change in our human plans due to

weather or some other unforeseen event will result in a PIM Team being in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time. But so often these little diversions lead to a new opportunity to share the Gospel with someone, build a new relationship or lend a much needed helping hand during some local crisis.

It is good to be reminded of the One who is working out His purpose:

*Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.* Proverbs 19:21

Please pray for the PIM Teams. Their planning is important, but God's purposes more so.



## PWMU NEWS A GREAT START TO THE YEAR

PWMU WAS VERY PLEASED to hold the inaugural “PWMU in the City” on 16 March 2017 in the excellent facilities of Robert White Hall on Collins St.

The main features of the meeting were the guest speakers, Calvin and Ruth Mathys, who are with Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT)/Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Calvin and Ruth presented an overview of their work in PNG.

Ruth, who helps train local Bible translators, showed a video of one of her classes, in which the group acted out the forty years that the Israelites spent in the desert. This amply demonstrated how hands-on role playing suited the learning style of the Melanesian people.

Many people make the assumption that Calvin is a pilot, but as an aircraft engineer, he is very important, as without constant maintenance the planes could not be flown. It is also readily assumed that Calvin and Ruth are translators once they mention WBT. Their talk was a testament to the importance of support workers to the actual work undertaken by Bible translators. The meeting concluded with everyone enjoying the chance to catch up and talk to the guest speakers while having lunch.

On 20 April 2017, PWMU held its annual Country Rally. This year the meeting was held at Drouin Presbyterian Church and was hosted by the local PWMU branch. The morning programme was led by the Gipps-

land Regional Association. The assistant pastor at Drouin, Wayne McArdle, presented a devotional on Philippians 4:8-14. The guest speaker was one of our new missionaries, Andrew Adams, who intends to work in Japan. Andrew gave an immensely enjoyable talk about his background, call to mission work and future plans. The nearly forty people present responded by digging deep when it came to the offering.

After lunch, PWMU Council conducted an interactive game. We then prayed in groups through a variety of prayer points pertaining to missionaries. It was a great day.

*Esther Vayne is the President of the PWMU in Victoria.*

## CHRISTIAN PASTORS KIDNAPPED

MORE THAN TWO MONTHS ago, Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted. He was abducted from a highway in Malaysia by a group of masked men in a professionally conducted operation.

Pastor Raymond, who has a wife, Susanna, and three adult children, worked in a non-government organisation called Harapan Komuniti (The Hope of the Community), working with the poor and marginalised, irrespective of religion or ethnicity. As Malaysia is a Muslim majority nation, some of the beneficiaries would have included Muslims. In Malaysia, where apostasy from Islam is illegal, there has been speculation that his abduction was religiously motivated.

Since the publicity surrounding Pastor Raymond's abduction, it has come to light that another

pastor, Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth, are also missing. Pastor Joshua is a pastor of Malay background (the majority ethnic group in Malaysia). In Malaysia to be Malay is to be Muslim, and there are legal and social repercussions for Malay converts. Very little is known about this missing couple compared to what is known about Pastor Raymond's abduction.

It appears that limited progress has been made in investigations. Most recently, Peter Chong, a Malaysian social activist, claimed that he travelled to Thailand to meet a source who had information on Pastor Raymond. Peter claimed that he himself was kidnapped when he actually reached Thailand. Peter has since returned safely to Malaysia and the Malaysian police have recorded statements from him.

Currently there remain more questions than answers in the case of these missing pastors. It certainly is a reminder to pray for the persecuted church worldwide and to be thankful for the relative freedom of religion we have here in Australia.

Please do pray for:

- Pastor Raymond and the Hilmys to be returned unharmed
- Comfort for their families
- Wisdom for the Malaysian police and government
- Strength and safety for the people continuing their work without them
- Unity in the Malaysian church
- Wisdom in evangelism in Malaysia
- Muslims and other non-Christians to come to know our Lord and Saviour.

*Writer's name has been withheld for safety reasons.*

## YOUTHMETRO TRAINING CONTINUES

YOUTHMETRO IS A wonderful training opportunity for young and/or potential leaders in the local church to be trained in evangelism and discipleship. On Saturday 19 November 2016, one group finished their year of training and another group began theirs.

Each trainee works alongside an older member of their congregation who can be a help and an encouragement to their Christian growth. The mentor meets regularly with the trainee and they discuss chapters of a book they have been reading together and talk about the devotional reading of the Scriptures the trainee is expected to work through. The local church is an important place of training and experience, and so these trainees will also take the opportunity to share their testimony and to prepare and lead a Bible study. It is a great blessing for young leaders to have someone who can give them honest feedback and encouragement when they are doing things for the first time.

We hope these newly trained young people will take the opportunities to share the gospel and disciple others in following Jesus in the local church, with PYV, and in other settings too.

The new group of trainees met for an intensive week during the PYV Summer Camp. Here they learned about theology with Toby McIntosh and evangelism with Nathan Barbieri. Throughout 2017, they continue to learn as they attend Engage '17, take part in activities at church, and meet with their trainers each week. For more information about Engage Youth Leaders conference visit the website

[www.engageleadersconference.com](http://www.engageleadersconference.com) and to find out more about YouthMETRO visit the [www.metrotraineeship.org.au/youthmetro/](http://www.metrotraineeship.org.au/youthmetro/) website.

*Brian Harvey is the Presbyterian Youth Victoria Ministry Director*

## PYV WEST CAMP ROMANS & REFORMATION

IN APRIL, A GROUP OF teenagers and leaders met together in Halls Gap for the 2017 PYV West Camp. This year our theme for the regional camps is “Romans and Reformation”, to highlight the significance of this year as the 500 year anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. It also gives us the chance to recognise that the book of Romans played an essential role in the Reformation.

Our speaker was our Youth Ministries Director, Brian Harvey. He focussed on the freedom that the gospel of Jesus brings. Freedom from sin and freedom from condemnation are two key phrases from Romans under this theme, but also freedom from God’s anger – propitiation.

The leadership team was convened by Toby McIntosh from Warrnambool. It was exciting to see some new leaders getting some solid experience,

and to see them being so well supported by more experienced leaders.

Halls Gap provides a number of activities, and the Saturday afternoon was a time for people to enjoy a walk to Boronia Peak, a short drive to MacKenzie Falls, or a stroll into town for ice-cream.

Study groups provide an opportunity for the groups to reflect on the things the passage of Scripture reveals. Questions can be asked and teenagers are learning to read the Bible in a deeper way. We hope these groups, along with the devotional times each morning, will give teenagers tools they can use at home in their own Bible reading and study.

By the end of camp we knew of two young women who had come to faith in Jesus during the camp. Praise God for what he is doing in the lives of the youth of our church communities.

If you would like to see a fuller report of PYV West Camp, you can read Brian’s blog at <http://ministryandyouth.blogspot.com.au/>

Thank you for praying for PYV and in particular for our West Camp 2017.

*Brian Harvey is the Presbyterian Youth Victoria Ministry Director.*



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## CHURCHES

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### GEELONG WEST ON PARADE

#### THE BUILDING IS GONE, BUT THE CHURCH IS VIBRANT

FOR SOME YEARS NOW, we at Geelong West Presbyterian Church have been involved in the annual multicultural festival known as Pako Festa. It's held every February, is the largest such festival in our state, and happily, it takes place in our church's street!

In the early years we used to just march in the parade with a church banner, wearing t-shirts bearing our church logo and handing out invitations to our outreach service on Sunday evenings. Over the years this has developed to providing a 'chill out zone' with tables, chairs, free drinks, children's activities, puppet shows and 'show bags', all with the very clear purpose of seeking opportunities to share the gospel with some of the many thousands of people who visit our street. We prepare hand-outs about church activities, have attractive gospel tracts on the tables and make a special push to advertise our upcoming *Christianity Explored* course. And we just sit and chat with people.

We have also been assisted by local Gideons who don't just hand out Bibles, but do a wonderful job of engaging visitors in

conversation about the God of the Bible.

Each year we have been thrilled by the conversations had, the contacts made, the Bibles received and the good will that has been generated in the community.

But in April 2016 our church was the victim of an arson attack and our involvement in Pako Festa 2017 looked difficult, to say the least. Where do you start with a scruffy-looking empty block enclosed by wonky, temporary cyclone fencing, no running water and no power? Well I, for one, thought that we could justifiably have the year off, but the faithful and hardy folk from Geelong West were determined to participate. Thus it transpired that with prayer, vision, enthusiasm and sheer hard work, a rather different outreach was planned. The council was consulted, the fencing removed and the block tidied. Gravel was put down, marquees were hired, a caravan was brought on site, games were invented and once again the Gideons were asked to join us.

Geelong West members turned out in force to welcome more visitors than ever before, children painted plaster models and played games, adults had a welcome rest and cuppa, many conversations were had - many along the lines of 'the building is gone but God and His church are not' and both literature and invitations were distributed.

One of the four Gideon members who was there reported: 'There were around 60 people who accepted New Testaments in individual witnessing opportunities. Of even greater interest - particularly to people from differing cultural backgrounds - was the excitement regarding the Gideon Bible app as a free download in over 1000 languages. Large numbers of people took cards giving details of this free

bible app, which is available in both video and audio format.'

As you can imagine, we were so thankful to have been involved in another Pako Festa and to have had so many opportunities, in both word and deed, to bear witness to our Saviour's love and grace.

*Sue White is a member of the Geelong West Presbyterian Church.*

### NEW CHURCH FOR THE BELLARINE PENINSULA

WE'VE NAMED IT Bellarine Peninsula Church. Negotiations have been ongoing with the Uniting Church for use of the Newington Uniting Church property on the Wallington-Ocean Grove Road. We can now confirm that these premises have been made available for our use by the Uniting Church, initially for a period of 12 months.

The Interim Session of the Bellarine Presbyterian Church has been formed and comprises Dr A M Harman OAM (Moderator), Rev John Cromarty and Elder Neil Mansfield (Session Clerk and Board Secretary). The Board of Management comprises Session and Mr Ben Lester as Treasurer.

A public meeting was held on Saturday 7 January 2017 at the Newington Uniting Church premises, at which twenty people were in attendance, four of whom were children. Three Session Meetings were held during December and January. The Interim Board of Management also met in January. About thirty Bibles and hymn books have been purchased/donated, as well as a Session Minute Book and Treasurer's Cash Book. Other items for use in the congregation are also being pursued. A work-





Sunday 23 April at Bellarine Presbyterian Church.



Dave and Jan Martin



Scots Day Out

ing-bee was held on Saturday 4 February to set up the premises for the first service. The first worship service was held on 5 February 2017 at 10 o'clock, with Allan Harman taking the service. Thereafter, Allan Harman and John Cromarty have taken services on alternate Sundays with a number of supply preachers having already been approached in case they are needed in the future. Services have averaged thirty-six people, with forty-three attending on Sunday 23 April.

This means that the historic Newington Uniting Church, where services have been conducted since 1858, will continue to be a place of worship for the foreseeable future, though the Uniting Church held its last service there in December last year.

Anyone wanting further information can contact either Allan Harman 0419 102 980; (email allan.m.harman@bigpond.com), or John Cromarty 5229 1510; (email crojoh@bigpond.com).

*Neil Mansfield is the Session Clerk of Bellarine Presbyterian Church.*

## SCOTS DAY OUT ST JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BENDIGO

MEMBERS OF BENDIGO (St John's) and Bendigo South East (Reforming) pooled their talents to again set up a stall and be a Christian witness at the "Scots

Day Out" (SDO) celebrations held in Bendigo.

The team were kept busy with a flow of people who were offered free Scotch biscuits and a leaflet which contained a history of the Presbyterian Church in Victoria (with special reference to Bendigo), a brief summary of the gospel and contact details for the three Presbyterian Churches in our city.

This year was had a new highlight in our approach. It was a quiz, written by Rev John Sutherland, called "How well do you know Scotland?" The quiz drew lots of interest. In the end, the average mark for the quiz was a bare 'pass'!

We are grateful for the opportunity to be involved in the Bendigo SDO and give thanks to God for the opportunities to share his wonderful gospel.

*Philip Burns is the minister at St John's Presbyterian Church in Bendigo.*

## NEW LIFE COMING TO OFFICER

THE FIRST THING WE DID when Richard Wilson suggested that I be the church planter for Officer was to go and visit the place. Knowing of the sacrifice needed to plant a church I wanted to know whether I could really love the place and the people. That was the first surprise; we could. Since then we've prayed over and over again that Christ would build his church.

The second hurdle was the Geneva Push assessment. An external assessment is very important lest we be self-approving. It was very important to me because I had thought I was too old to plant. I would much rather trust the experience of Geneva Push assessors than my own opinion. To my surprise, they thought 'age' spelled 'experience' in handling difficulties and making wise choices.

The best part about planting a church is that you are teaming up with the Lord Jesus Christ to build his church. This is not Dave Martin's church plant, nor is it the PCV's church plant. It is the Lord's and he will build it. This is why prayer is a key ingredient. One of my strategies will be to go on walks through the streets of Officer, praying for the people in all the new houses. The most urgent prayers at the moment are:

- Raising up a godly launch team with the gifts needed to start.
- Finding a ministry apprentice who wants to start with me.
- Securing the financial support needed.
- Not being too distracted in the meantime.

One of the blessings along the way has been meeting Iain Bramley, one of my assessor elders. He is wise, like-minded and willing to serve. His experience in government and Presbyterian politics is already proving a great asset. The other assessor elder is John Huynh and I'm very much looking forward to working

with him as well. Peter and Gail Roberts from the Cranbourne Presbyterian Church have been another blessing. Peter's willingness to help shows great gospel partnership. These are reminders of the great Presbyterian principle of team ministry that perhaps could happen more. It takes the plans and prayers of a denomination to plant a church rather than individuals doing their own thing. That's why the work of the Church Planting Committee should be cherished. And speaking of a whole denomination, I hope to cross presbytery boundaries again and visit my soon-to-be near neighbours on the eastern side to ask for help (Drouin and Warragul). I have also been welcomed and significantly encouraged by Follow Baptist Church in Officer.

In today's world we have to be creative in both our ministry and our marketing. I have opted to call the church 'New Life Presbyterian Church' because people in Officer are making a new life for themselves and because our mission is to help people find 'new life' in Christ. Our website will, if possible, attempt to mirror the streetscape of a growing suburb. The vision of the church will be 'a place to connect, grow and serve Christ'. It has appeal to people in the world as a place to connect, yet it also pushes people to grow and be mission minded in serving Christ. Ultimately, the connecting, growing and serving will all be directed towards helping people find 'new life' in Christ. And within a ten kilometre radius of Officer, there are 100,000 lost souls!

Secondly, we have to be courageous in our evangelistic efforts. We need to think outside the square and find ways to build genuine relationships with those around us. I am going to try street corner barbecues on Friday afternoons in the new housing

estates. In the more established areas like Berwick and Pakenham, I'm going to set up 'The Bible in Bottle Tops' around shopping centres for a couple of hours a week. Evangelism takes time. The church planting literature says I should be devoting fifteen hours a week to evangelism. Please pray that I will do that. We are also encouraging members to be involved in a least one sporting or community organisation like CFA, Rotary or a sporting club. We are hoping to establish a community garden on the church's property as well. And, God willing, we will offer Marriage Enrichment seminars.

What I know is that I can't do this. But, thankfully, Christ builds his church and I can step out in faith trusting him. Would you like to journey with me in prayer? If so, please email [dhmartin2@gmail.com](mailto:dhmartin2@gmail.com).

*David Martin is set to plant New Life Presbyterian Church in Officer.*

## EBENEZER NEW MINISTRIES IN OLD BUILDINGS

TO THE GLORY OF GOD Almighty, in 2017, the congregation of Ebenezer St Johns Presbyterian Church begins its 160th year of ministry to the people of Ballarat and internationally – Ebenezer has sent missionaries to Korea. In keeping with this, and consistent with the example given by Paul when he spoke in Athens, we are developing the opportunities through which we can share the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Specifically, beginning on 12 February, we are extending our "Ebenezer Café Church" from two Sundays to every Sunday each month. This means that we have two complementary services in which we worship Jesus by

learning from his word, singing his praise and encouraging each other in our walk with the Lord.

**10:15 @ Ebenezer**, is a traditional service. Biblical preaching is accompanied by timeless hymns played on an organ and supported by our choir. Children who would like to draw, colour or complete the biblical puzzles that are supplied may do so. We have decided not to have a Sunday school per se. The service begins promptly at ten-fifteen in the morning and is followed by a friendly catch-up over tea or coffee.

**Ebenezer Café Church**, is a contemporary service with times for coffee/tea and discussion. Biblical talks are opened to the congregation for question and comment. The music focusses on Jesus; it is new and heartening. Children have their own table and are encouraged to participate in all areas of worship. We arrive at about a quarter to six for a chat and the service begins at six o'clock.

Rather than merely maintain our traditional service, the Session recognises that people of all ages need to hear and re-hear the gospel. We plan for "10:15 @ Ebenezer" to continue and expand its outreach to Ballarat's retirees and more mature citizens through specific ministries and worship that draw from and reflect the rich biblical heritage that Ebenezer has at hand. Will you please pray for this work, asking our Lord to glorify his name through more people walking closer with Jesus and attending his church.

Twelve months ago, we began Ebenezer Café Church as a monthly service that was more like a very large bible study with singing. After six months, we were encouraged to move to twice a month and by the end of 2016 the groundswell was for a weekly service. After much prayer and

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## EXIT STUDENT PROFILES

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work, our leadership team decided on weekly services, provided these are open to students, families of all ages, empty-nesters and whomever our Lord calls from whatever circumstance.

Our facilities have been partially refurbished to meet new requirements and this upgrade will continue as funds become available. The leadership is praying for the Holy Spirit to use this ministry to glorify our heavenly Father, to bless all those who love Jesus Christ and to encourage all who worship at Ebenezer St Johns Presbyterian Church. Please, will you join them in that prayer.

*Steve North is the minister of Ballarat South (Ebenezer) Presbyterian Church.*

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## MINISTRY MOVES

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### Presbytery of Melbourne East

Rev Trevor Cox, Minister of Chalmers Presbyterian Church, Auburn, has advised Presbytery that he wishes to retire as Minister at Auburn on 1 May 2017. Presbytery has accepted his demission and appointed Rev David Assender as Interim Moderator.

South Yarra Presbyterian Church ordained and inducted Mr Craig Manners as an Elder of South Yarra on Sunday 5 March 2017.

Canterbury Presbyterian Church ordained and inducted Mr Marcus Campbell, Mr Todashi Hanazono, and Mr Michael Smith as Elders of Canterbury on Sunday 5 March 2017.

### Presbytery of Melbourne North

Rev Andy Buchan was licensed and ordained at Eltham on 21st April 2017. He now serves with Rev Don Elliot as Assistant Pastor at Eltham Presbyterian Church.

## ANDY BUCHAN NO LIGHTNING STRIKE CONVERSION

I grew up in Tusmore in Adelaide, before moving to the Adelaide Hills as a teenager. I always knew about God, but he didn't mean much to me until I was about twelve, when I started to see it was real. During upper high school I gradually started to understand for myself the truth of my own brokenness and to discover the depth of God's grace. Eventually, I began to live out my faith as a Christian. It wasn't one of those radical, lightning strike conversions – it took time to sink in! But it's the same incredible result. There was no way I was going to get right with God on my own; I needed to see that it took Jesus to die for my sin.

After finishing school, I studied music at the University of Adelaide, then worked as a teacher and musician. Soon after university I began work at a Christian campsite called "Wirraway" in Strathalbyn, where I eventually met Taimi. We were married in 2004 and lived and worked at the camp from 2005-2010. We now have two children, Eli, who is eleven and Nadia, who is nine. At Wirraway, I worked as a youth worker, running outdoor adventure activities and speaking during a Christian program for each camp.

Taimi grew up south of Adelaide, near Port Noarlunga beach. She studied as a primary school teacher. During our time at Wirraway, Taimi managed the horse program, the office, and the kitchen. When we moved to Melbourne, she took up a role at 'Mainly Music' headquarters



as an area coach, before recently returning to relief teaching.

After the work in camping ministry, having been involved in a church plant with the Trinity Network, I started work for Trinity Mount Barker. I began part time study at Bible College (SA) in 2009, and we moved to Melbourne at the start of 2014 when I started at Eltham. I completed my studies at PTC at the end of 2016.

The most helpful thing I've learned from studying theology is that Scripture speaks! Firstly to you, the reader – but it is God's Word to all of us. The most important thing I've learnt about preaching is that the authority required is the Word of God, not you! I've appreciated the focus that the lecturers at PTC have on preaching and applying the Bible, as well as their clear, rigorous, faithful, and Reformed teaching. The time serving with Don Elliott (and God's people in Eltham) has been invaluable experience.

Eltham PC has been a great church in which to grow in my faith and ministry. We've come to see how much church is like an extended family, and learned the importance and benefits of team ministry. It is an honour and privilege to see people continuing to be built up in their faith and serving in the Kingdom, in Eltham and beyond.

*Andy Buchan was licensed and ordained at Eltham on 21st April 2017. He now serves with Don Elliot as Assistant Pastor at Eltham Presbyterian Church.*

## OBITUARY

### REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF THE **LATE ISABEL G. BELL**

**Isabel G Bell 1928 - 2016**

**I**sabel had a servant heart – not counting the cost of what she did, but taking it as a privilege to serve her Lord and fellow human beings.

Isabel came to live in Sunshine when she was appointed to be a student teacher in this area. Upon her marriage to Gilbert in 1952, Isabel became a member of Sunshine Presbyterian Church. She had many talents, and always sought to use them for the Lord's glory and for the benefit of others. She was involved in this church's Girls' ministry, and led the PGA, where she encouraged participation in both sporting and spiritual activities.

Isabel supported the Billy Graham Crusades, and the Presbyterian Evangelical Rallies that were held in the city after 1959. She hosted a mission prayer meeting which commenced in the 1950's and continued to function until the year of her death.

Early in her marriage she was given a vision to see Christian Schools established in Victoria. This led her to become a driving force behind the estab-

lishment of schools in Sunshine (1982) and Belgrave Heights (1983).

Isabel became an elder of this church in 1992. She always had a passion for the people of Sunshine who had not experienced God's saving grace, and participated in street ministry. Thousands of contacts were made around the main shopping area of Sunshine, and thousands of gospel tracts from this church have been distributed – plus various language scriptures, Jesus videos and children's videos.

Psalm 16: 11 says: "You will fill me with joy in your presence and with eternal pleasures at your right hand." It was evident that Isabel experienced a foretaste of what 'joy in your presence' means in this life, and she longed for that to be made complete. Whilst the Sunshine Congregation has felt a great sense of loss since her passing, they rejoice that Isabel has arrived home.

*Colin Phillips is an elder at Sunshine Presbyterian Church.*

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Clayton

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Cnr Clayton Rd + Shandeanu Ave

Free + Lunch Provided

RSVP for catering purposes:  
Karlene 0458203886

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(MD, MDiv) of the CCEF in Pennsylvania

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Wikimedia Commons | Ferdinand Pauwels | Luther posting his 95 theses 1517

## PROCLAIM CHRIST CELEBRATING THE REFORMATION

This is your invitation to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his ninety-five theses – and the launch of the Protestant Reformation. In October this year, the Presbyterian Church of Australia marks this event and we invite you to join us.

Our chosen theme is “Taking God Seriously”. This is our chance:

- to reacquaint ourselves with Reformation truth;
- to take a firm hold of free and sovereign grace offered through Christ; and
- to engage in the great task of the evangelism of the lost.

To help us remember and to reacquaint ourselves with Reformation truth, we’re offering free internet access to two historical video presentations on Luther. These will be suitable for use in small-group ministry, will run for approximately half an hour, and will have discussion questions attached.

To help us take a firm hold on Christ and to understand sovereign grace more clearly, we’re publishing the book *Truth Matters*. Eight Australian Presbyterian ministers have each written a chapter on the major theological themes of the Bible. This book is ideal for home Bible study groups, and is still available – \$5 per copy (or 12 for \$50) from the NSW Church offices. Contact: [general@pcnsw.org.au](mailto:general@pcnsw.org.au).

To help us engage in the evangelism of the lost, we’re encouraging every congregation to organise outreach events. To assist, a panel of PCA-trained evangelists from throughout the nation is being assembled and will be available upon request. Some churches are holding men’s breakfasts, ladies afternoon teas, after school meetings for children, question and answer sessions for students, restaurant meetings, and guest services for Sundays. Contact David Cook at: [dac@damc.com.au](mailto:dac@damc.com.au)

As we remember Martin Luther’s zeal for the gospel and his energy for drawing people to Christ, it is only fitting to engage in evangelism! Luther was many things but he was never selfish with the grace of God and the glory of the gospel. We dare not be selfish with our laying hold of Reformation truth, as historian Stephen Nichols says: “We remember Luther best when we proclaim Christ and the gospel to our world of need.”

Four tracts have been produced. We are grateful to Bill Medley, Phil Campbell, Bryson Smith and Cameron and Rachel Griffiths for these. They are ideal to hand out to people or to have available at your church door. *Three Reasons To Take God Seriously, Why should you take Jesus seriously?*, *Hungry Hearts* and the one for children, *Taking God Seriously*, are now available by contacting [general@pcnsw.org.au](mailto:general@pcnsw.org.au).

These have been produced thanks to funding from the General Assembly Trustees and are available for the cost of postage only.

Finally, as Moderator-General, John Wilson and his wife, Paula, are leading a tour of Reformation sites in Europe to coincide with the actual date of Luther’s public challenge, 31st October. This tour is now closed, but you are invited to pray for its success and witness. For two days the tour group will meet in conference with the World Reformed Fellowship Assembly in historic Wittenberg.

Our Committee has worked hard to make these resources available so that our celebration of the Reformation might have an eternal impact. Please pray that they will.

*John P Wilson is the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.*

*Paula Wilson and John Wilson are leading a tour of Reformation sites in Europe this October.*

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## SURVIVING THE NEW DARK AGE

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### **The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation** By Rod Dreher

(New York: Sentinel, 2017). Hardcover: 272 pages.

ISBN: 978-0735213296.

Reviewed by Stephen McAlpine

Since its recent publication, Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option: A Strategy For Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*, has been read about more than read. But once read, it becomes clear how wide of the mark is the assumption that Dreher is calling for either the cultural withdrawal of fundamentalism or the actual withdrawal of the sects and cults.

Indeed, Dreher summarises his work by stating that the Benedict Option "is not a technique for reversing the losses, political or otherwise, that Christians have suffered.... Still less is it a plan for constructing communities of the pure, cut off from the real world." (p. 236)

So what, then, is the Benedict Option? As the subtitle states, Dreher offers a way forward for Christians, in an increasingly hostile public square, one from which God has been driven. And it's grounded in the original Benedictine monastery model, which established "thick" Christian communities, ordered by a Rule, that constituted strategic withdrawals from a collapsing Roman Empire.

However, this is not withdrawal as an end in itself, but withdrawal in order to return.

Dreher is calling on Christians, Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical, to undertake three major tasks: 1) to reform the "thick" Christianity-as-village -life that St Benedict modelled; 2) to do so as a counter to the prevailing narrative of the liberal secular frame of our day; and 3) to create cultural liturgies – ways of doing Christian life together – that will shape and form us, and will help us do mission, in the face of an atomising, sexualised, broken West.

The book has an American audience in mind, and to some, here in historically secular Australia, the push against the Christian frame may elicit a "So what's new?" After all, Christianity in Australia has never had the sway it has had in the United States. However, that would be to miss the point.

Dreher helpfully charts the history of the Benedictine Order and how the falling Roman Empire

often prefigures our own setting. He proceeds to a potted Western history of "how we got here", before presenting a series of interviews with Benedictine monks from the Norcia monastery in Italy.

It's a good read insofar as it's informative and accessible. His exploration of asceticism, rhythm, order and community, among other things, is not intended to be carbon-copied, but to be used as a foundation for how we in modern Western cities might shape our Christian lives.

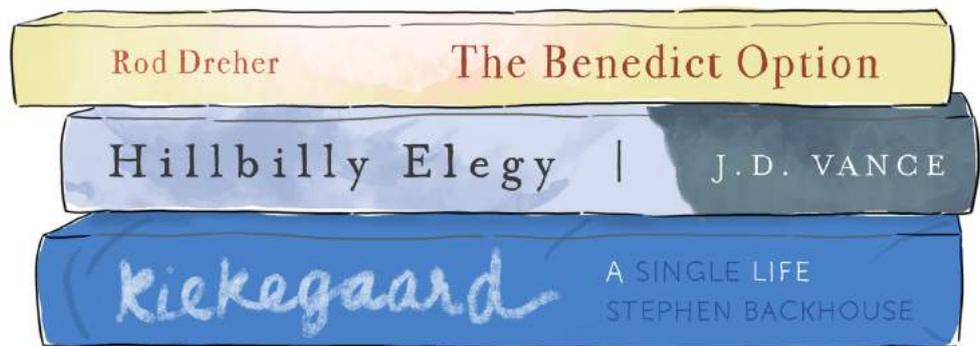
I found some of his implications for politics and education less applicable in our Australian setting. For example, chapter 4, "A New Kind of Christian Politics", reveals that the political pendulum will swing as hard against you as it has swung for you. We're far more used to being on the outer politically in Australia, so I suspect neither the shock nor the push back will be as strong here. Were we ever a Christian enough nation in the first place to now be considered "post"-Christian?

His warning that many professions and employment opportunities will increasingly be closed to those who do not assent to the new sexual ethics is both timely and true, and increasingly seen in Australian public life. And his final two chapters on how the new sexuality and the new technologies are shaping us are sobering but invigorating reading.

So, read Dreher's book for what it says it is: a strategy, not the final word on how to lock ourselves away from the world. Take him at his word when he says, "We are not looking to create heaven on earth; we are simply looking for a way to be strong in faith through a great time of testing." (p. 54)

And that's something every saint has had to do, as they seek to model themselves on their Lord and Saviour, who passed the ultimate test for his people, and calls them to fidelity today.

*Stephen McAlpine is a pastor of Providence Church in Midland, just outside of Perth, WA.*



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## A BRILLIANT BUT TORTURED SOUL

### **Kierkegaard: A Single Life**

By Stephen Backhouse

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016). Hardcover: 304 pages.

ISBN: 978-0310520887.

Reviewed by Campbell Markham

**T**he short and tempestuous life of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855, pronounced Keer-ka-gor) was lived almost entirely in Copenhagen.

Stephen Backhouse parades the significant people and events of Kierkegaard's life allegro, yet with a satisfying amount of detail. His father is wealthy, austere and ultra-pious. Kierkegaard himself has an Einsteinian intellect. He learns and then thinks with ease in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

As a teen, he trains for the Lutheran ministry: a respectable upper-middle class occupation for bright Danes. But the theological student is also the consummate dandy, racking up eye-watering debts at the bookshop, tailor, restaurant and theatre. He is Copenhagen's most dazzling conversationalist.

Aged 27, Kierkegaard is smitten by the exquisite Regine Olsen. They are engaged, and then the pain begins. It is excruciating to watch a man – a brilliant, confused and tortured soul who fears hurting his fiancée in marriage – treat her with perversely calculated cruelty, to make her give him up. She truly loves him, and only lets him go after a long and painful struggle.

Kierkegaard's fiercely warped devotion for Regine continues even after her marriage to another, and shapes covertly and overtly every part of his massive written corpus.

His writings are difficult. He wrote mostly under pseudonyms, and his books were largely self-published. Their release was carefully timed – some pseudonymous works often came out on the same day

– and they interact elaborately one with the other.

They are also overwhelmingly polemical. The State Lutheran Church is rich, urbane and Hegelian to the core. God is revealed in culture – high Western art (of course) – and God's pastors are Denmark's comfortable civil servants: educated, unbelieving and entirely non-confrontational.

Kierkegaard launched his books as missiles against this complacent Christendom. He attacks with biting sarcasm, caustic humour, unrelenting irony and sheer verbiage.

In *Fear and Trembling* he shows that true faith, like that of Abraham, involves deep crisis and commitment. (Karl Barth was highly influenced by Kierkegaard.) In *Practice in Christianity* he shows that the real Christian is willing to stand alone and suffer against a Christ-less world. In *For Self-Examination* he compels every Christian to be genuine about their faith. In his final *Attack on Christendom* he rails hard against the Danish church and print-media.

Unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard died, aged 42, despised and wretchedly lonely.

Kierkegaard was not convinced that the Bible was historically true, and his theology is unbalanced at best. But he knew what Christianity is not, and his powerful critiques should be heard and weighed today, especially by us who belong to the often comfortable and complacent churches of the West.

The last third of the book comprises summaries of Kierkegaard's works. Backhouse is clearly a master of the material. He makes the core message of each book clear, and stimulates you to tackle them for yourself.

*Kierkegaard: A Single Life* is thoroughly enjoyable, a brilliant and confronting book about a brilliant and confronting man.

Rev. Campbell Markham is pastor of Cornerstone Church, Hobart.

# A CRITIQUE OF A FAMILY AND A CULTURE

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## **Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis**

By J.D. Vance

(New York: HarperCollins, 2016). Hardcover: 272 pages.

ISBN: 9780062300546.

Reviewed by Chris Ashton

J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* is easily the most surprising literary success of the last year, and one of the strangest books to have hit number 1 on the New York Times bestseller list.

It's a well-written but straightforward account of Vance's hillbilly upbringing, the family's move from Appalachian Kentucky to what is now rustbelt Ohio. The Economist said that "you will not read a more important book about America", and the Sunday Times called it "the political book of the year". Perhaps.

In any case, it contains no real political analysis and very little commentary of any kind. Rather, it is, as it says, "a memoir of a family" and, by extension, of a culture.

Its appeal is surely its uniqueness – when was the last time you read anything serious about white, working-class poverty? For this reason, it has even been credited with predicting Donald Trump's victory, and with explaining it. Perhaps.

Vance was initially raised by his single (notwithstanding the passing parade of loser boyfriends and occasional husbands that move in for a time) mother. It's a dangerous, sad and depraved environment.

In one particularly depressing episode that sums up family life, the young boy is forced to provide "clean piss" to enable his mother to take a drug test to keep her nursing accreditation. During high school, the young man moves in with his grandparents, "Mamaw and Papaw", which may have saved his life.

"America has a problem," writes Vance. "My primary aim is to tell a true story about what that problem feels like when you were born with it hanging around your neck." And so he has.

Perhaps, more than anything else, *Hillbilly Elegy* is a critique of the baby-boomer generation of his usually well-meaning but almost always hopeless mother. The hero of this tale is Mamaw. With Papaw she knew domestic chaos and marital discord, but also relative stability, believing in certain unchanging truths.

For all her faults, the foul-mouthed Mamaw encouraged him to take responsibility for himself,

avoid those who don't, and to work hard at school. He eventually joins the Marines, then attends Ohio State University, then on to Yale Law School, where perhaps for the first time he saw with clarity the gulf between the lives and priorities of "his people" and those who run the country, represented in this case by urbane Ivy League New Englanders. Anyway, he's now a wealthy finance whiz or some such thing.

Vance speaks fondly of Mamaw's Protestantism, and laments his mother's generation's rejection of that creed's work, sexual and financial ethics, for example. But, as Christians, we need to be on guard against this faint praise of a false religion. The religion in question is that of sub-Christian nationalism. Vance says Mamaw's two deities were Jesus and Country, and this is where the dust-jacket reviews about Donald Trump become interesting.

Many Australian Christians will think Trump the most vulgar, obtuse and dishonest man to ever run for public office. While we understand why Christians might have voted for the Donald over his opponent, it is beyond belief that Christian leaders would stump for him, host church services in his honour, and essentially anoint him as God's specific messiah.

The Australian church is not the American church, and so the context looks different; but nevertheless we find in *Hillbilly Elegy* a good lesson in how all kinds of enthusiasms sneak into the church and corrupt its message.

But, more than this, Christians should learn from Vance's "memoir of a family" about the importance of family. If Mamaw and Papaw's marriage is the first thing that pops into a person's head when they read Ephesians 5:22-33, then their pastor and elders have a lot of work to do. But at least they stayed together.

And they stayed together, even despite verbal and occasionally physical abuse from both sides. Their marriage, such as it was, and the only relative stability that it provided Vance, may have saved his life, and it certainly helped to lift the American problem from around one young man's neck.

*Chris Ashton is the pastor of Peshurst Presbyterian Church, NSW, and a regular columnist for The Spectator Australia magazine.*

## SILENCE NO EASY ANSWERS HERE

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Reviewed by Rev Dean Carroll

**M**artin Scorsese's latest film *Silence* is based on Shusaku Endo's 1966 book of the same name. It is a hard movie to watch, but it is worth watching. A fictional account of Portuguese priests in 17th Century Japan, it—at times graphically—presents the persecution Christians faced when Christianity was outlawed.

Samurai are charged with rooting out Christians any way they can because Japan is Buddhist and no other religion can grow in the “swamp of Japan” (in contrast to planting the gospel in fertile soil). One priest begins to question why the peasants have to suffer so greatly. Why is God silent? Why does he seem deaf to their cries? All they have to do to avoid persecution and death is to renounce their faith by stepping on an image of Jesus. But is there salvation after apostatising? Is stepping on an image of Jesus really apostatising?

*Silence* does not offer simple answers; in fact, it doesn't really offer answers at all. It asks viewers to think, to make up their own minds, which is far from the norm in modern film-making. We want closure. We want neat and tidy. In a *Gospel Coalition* article Alex Duke has said “approaching *Silence* with the forensic, delightfully Protestant question—Is such-and-such character *really* a Christian?—will only end in frustration.” In our own lives this is a helpful thing to remember; that we are not God and we cannot know the hearts of people, even those who fall into the same sin again and again. Are they truly repentant? Are they not saved, or are they backslidden? We might have our opinion, but only God truly knows, so do we give up on them, or do we persevere with them because we acknowledge our own weaknesses?



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*Silence* is hard to watch. It will challenge you to think deeply about your own faith and repentance, about suffering for the gospel and the immense challenges of proclaiming the gospel in a culture that is strongly opposed to it. Japan is still a difficult place for Christian missionaries, as are many places around our world, and this movie will give you fuel for pray for such places.

Dean Carroll is the minister at Heathmont Presbyterian Church.