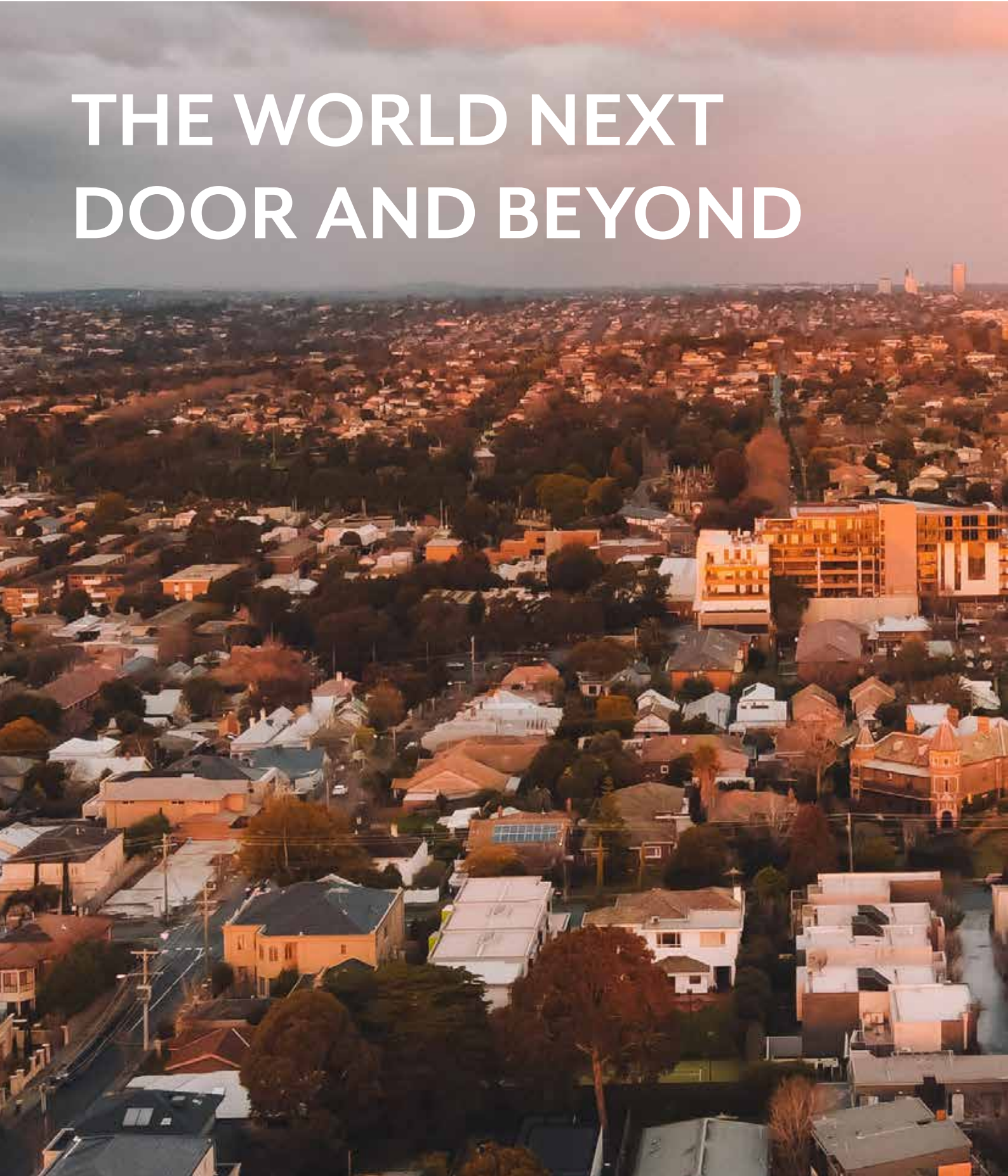


Winter 23 / Presbyterian Church of Victoria



FELLOW WORKERS

THE WORLD NEXT
DOOR AND BEYOND



Fellow Workers

Quarterly Magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. State News Committee: Stephen McDonald (Convenor), Phil Betts & Rob Paix.

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FELLOW WORKERS

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EDITORIAL: SIGNED, SEALED, AND DELIVERED

STEPHEN MCDONALD

Signs are important. Signs point to certain realities and tell us something about that reality.. As a child, I enjoyed learning to read road signs. I'm sure it was a relief to my parents that I no longer needed to ask 'Are we there yet?' and 'How long will it take?'

God knows that we need signs. He gives His Gospel promises in His Word (Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:8). But He also gives us signs that point to those promises and seal (or confirm) them. These signs are called sacraments.

Bible-believing Protestant Christians are often suspicious of anything that sounds ceremonial or ritualistic, and rightly so (Westminster Larger Catechism Q 108 & 109). Traditions and rituals can easily draw our attention to what is outward and physical rather than the truth of God which goes deep into our hearts (Hebrews 4:12).

But sacraments are given to us by God. The sacraments we celebrate (baptism and the Lord's Supper) were directly commanded by Jesus Himself (Matthew 28:19 & 1 Corinthians 11:23). That sets them apart from human traditions.

And that teaches us that there is something good and necessary about physical ways of communicating the Gospel.

WHAT SACRAMENTS ARE: SIGNS

At the foundation of Christianity is the doctrine of revelation: The one, true and living God has spoken, revealing Himself to His people (Hebrews 1:1-2:4). This revelation has come through the words of prophets and ultimately in the Living Word, the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ (John 1:1-18). "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." (John 1:18).

Yet, the God who made us knows how we easily forget what we have heard. So, He has given us two signs that point us to His good news promises to save everyone who repents and believes.

Baptism shows us God's promise to wash away the sin of everyone who turns from sin to depend on Jesus alone for salvation. And the Lord's Supper shows us the acceptance and welcome He extends to everyone who is united to Christ by faith.

See, the sacraments are not signs of our faith, but signs of God's gracious promises. We don't receive baptism primarily to declare our faith to God, but to receive a sign of His promise to save. We don't celebrate the Lord's Supper primarily to declare that we trust in Jesus, but to receive a sign of the blessings that He gives to us by faith. Ultimately, the sacraments are designed by God to show us Christ.

That's why the Westminster Catechism summarises the Bible's teaching like this:

“Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.” (WCF 27:1)

WHAT SACRAMENTS DO: SEALS

The language in the Confession comes straight from the Bible, in particular that phrase “signs and seals”. It comes from Romans 4:11, which explains not only what sacraments are, but what they do.

As Paul unpacks the way that God justified Abraham by faith, he explains:

“Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.” (Romans 4:10-11)

These rich verses underline that salvation is by faith alone, not by works, not even by observing the ceremonies instituted by God Himself. Yet they also explain what the Old Testament sacraments (circumcision and the Passover) did, and therefore what the New Testament sacraments do.

They are signs that point us to God's gospel promise of salvation for all who believe. And as they point to those promises, they seal them (see also Romans 15:8).

A seal confirms the authenticity of something. It proves that it is the real thing. So, by giving the sacraments, God confirms that His promises to save sinner by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone are true and they are for us.

That's why the New Testament can speak of believers being baptised into Christ (Galatians

3:27-28) and participating in the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). It's not just that we want to be washed clean by Jesus and share in His death; the sacraments assure us that God really does make us belong to Him and share in His death when He graciously gives us repentance and faith.

How gracious that God would not only declare the Gospel of salvation, but that He would give us visual confirmations of it!

WHAT DIFFERENCE SACRAMENTS MAKE

There's no escaping the fact that we live in a visual world. Screens large and small have replaced bookshelves and books in many people's lives. The tendency to trust what we see runs deep in people of every time and place.

How wonderful that God communicates to us through words: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17, see also 1 Corinthians 1:17). And how wonderful that the God who speaks confirms His Word by giving us signs and seals of His good news!

The sacraments do not save, and they must always be accompanied by the clear preaching of God's Word. But how much we miss out on when we downplay or ignore the sacraments God has given to us.

Fellow workers, do we gratefully receive the signs and seals of grace that God graciously gives?

Stephen McDonald is Convener of the State News Committee



WHAT'S ON AT NEW DUNESK IN 2023

Just 2km south of the New South Wales Riverina town of Ardlethan sits New Dunesk - a place to inspire, equip and send out God's people for Gospel work across Australia. As well as being the home of the Presbyterian Inland Mission, New Dunesk is also a place for the whole church, with a variety of events being run throughout the year that you can be involved in.

Take a look at our calendar of events for 2023, and consider getting involved:

COUNTRY PREACHERS WORKSHOP 29 JUNE – 2 JULY

Following our first highly successful preaching workshop in 2022, this new five-day workshop for country preachers builds on what was learnt previously to continue developing preaching skills, with a focus on the New Testament.

Presented by Stephen Williams from Langham Partnership.

FATHER/SON WEEKEND 14-16 JULY 2023

Fathers and sons* are invited to attend this adventure-filled camping weekend at New Dunesk. The event includes spectating the Australian Can Shooting Championships in Ardlethan, plus further talks on firearm safety, bonfire devotions and Sunday worship.

**Mothers and daughters are also welcome to attend!*

MINISTERS PREACHING WORKSHOP 22-24 AUGUST 2023

This four day workshop intended for ministers and regularly preaching elders focuses on developing preaching skills. Presented by David Cook from the Expository Preaching Trust.

NOMADS NETWORK TRAINING AUGUST 2023 – DATES TO FOLLOW

The PIM Nomads Network encourages and equips participants to use their Nomad travels for God's glory. Planning is underway for an evangelism training and networking weekend in August 2023. Register your interest to receive further details.

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING WORKSHOP SEPTEMBER 2023 - DATES TO FOLLOW

A four-day workshop for anyone who is eager to learn how to disciple others while also growing in your own faith as a disciple of Jesus.

CAMPER TRAILER MUSTER OCTOBER SCHOOL HOLIDAYS 2023

An opportunity for travelling families to come together, meet other people and be encouraged by the Gospel. Includes a number of evangelism focused talks, with sessions for both adults and children.

For further details on each of these events, please visit pim.org.au/new-dunesk.

To register your interest for a particular event, and to ensure you receive further information as it becomes available, please email ceo@pim.org.au or call 0438 868 964.

New Dunesk has something for everyone. Take a walk up the ridgeline track to see the sunrise, choose a book from the O'Brien library to read under the gumtrees, test your driving skills on the 4WD track, or relax by the fire with your fellow campers. The 600 acre property is also fully equipped with a powered conference centre, campground, camp kitchen and toilets.

Is your church, youth group or conference looking for a location to hold your 2023 camp? New Dunesk may be the perfect fit. To discuss this opportunity further, please contact the New Dunesk Manager Paul on 0493 294 798 or email newdunesk@pim.org.au.



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REFLECTIONS ON ZAMBIA

STEVE JONES

In April/May this year, Rev. Graham Nicholson and I were invited to join with Australian Presbyterian World Mission (APWM) to travel to Zambia for three weeks and train local pastors through the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod.

We gave lectures during the weekdays at a couple of 4-day pastoral retreats in Lusaka and Lundazi, and then spent weekends visiting churches, Chasefu Theological College and preaching. At the retreats, Graham spoke on Titus and 'Serving under the Goodness and Grace of God,' whereas I spoke on 'Grace and the Promise-Keeping God,' understanding, interpreting and applying the Old Testament in light of the big story of the Bible pointing to Jesus.

The whole journey was an incredible experience that we'll never forget.

Five reflections on our time over in Zambia.

1. Whereas our nation of Australia is very individualistic, Zambia is a country driven by community. Each person knows they are part of each other no matter what background, and even strangers care for each other well. We were made to feel like we belonged even from the first day - the men would even hold your hand as a way of showing they cared for you. They have a word here 'Ubuntu' which means 'I am.... because of you' showing their reliance on each other. It is beautiful to experience.
2. There is a peace and contentment in Zambia that is difficult to describe, particularly in the believers we met. Often we would see people who had next to nothing, and they would say things like: 'It's a great day!' and 'God is so good to us!'. They are either deluded or they know a hope bigger than the things of this world. After hearing them sing, I believe it is definitely the latter.
3. The people of Zambia as a whole are surprisingly gentle (except when driving!). Not once did I feel unsafe there. We could happily walk around the streets (sticking out like a sore thumb) and people were just strangely... pleasant, and kind. Any time we said thanks, we would hear this sweet 'You're welcome!' in the lovely Zambian accent.
4. Negatively, the Zambian people are affected by three P's: Petty crime, pollution and prosperity theology. The first is seen clearly in the security on everyone's fences (electric wires, razor wire and broken bottles in cement). The second is seen in the rubbish that is strewn everywhere on the sides of roads. The third is seen in visiting evangelists who come bringing a message guaranteeing health, wealth and happiness in this life, that many Zambians sadly buy into, but never benefit from.
5. The people of Zambia are very patient, especially in the church. For example: when they are constructing a church building, they prayerfully and patiently wait for God to provide the finances (through their giving, and the generosity of others). And when he does, they build the next stage, and then wait till he provides again, and then they do the next stage. It is painful to see for an impatient Aussie. But they smile, knowing that God is taking care of their needs.



GARDEN CONGREGATION – LUSAKA

There are many ways that we can help the CCAP Zambia, principally through prayer, but also generously giving. Currently, the three main financial needs of the church here are:

1. Putting roofs on church buildings (there are many needed - and at a cost of about \$12,000 each).
2. Supplying motorbikes for pastors transport for pastoral visits and evangelism, as most just have push bikes and sometimes need to travel 25km one way to visit their members (again, many needed and cost around \$3000 each), and
3. Chasefu Theological College is planning on holding a graduation service on 4 December 2023 for the first time in many years, and needs funding for 40 reusable gowns, presentations and catering (~\$4000). Perhaps you or your church could prayerfully consider how you could partner with them in this way? We'd love to hear from you!

Steve Jones is the Associate Minister at Drouin Presbyterian Church

MINISTRY MOVES

The Presbytery of Melbourne West inducted **Rev. Dinesh Mohanlal Taunk** into the pastoral charge of Melton on Friday 30th June.

On Friday 7th July, **Rev. Andy Wong** was inducted into the pastoral charge of Dandenong by the Presbytery of Flinders.

REFLECTIONS ON ZAMBIA

GRAHAM NICHOLSON

Would you be keen to go to church on Sunday for a 2-hour service if the floors were bare earth or dusty concrete, the windows few and far between (whether or not they had any glass) and because of lack of funds, the roof was not finished or perhaps not even started? Many of our Zambian brothers are sisters in the Church of Central Africa—Presbyterian (Zambian Synod), or CCAP-Zambia for short, do just that with great joy every week, although the wet season does understandably close down worship services for those buildings without a full roof.

When the open invitation for two ministers to consider going to Zambia was presented in September last year, the thought, “I could do that,” popped almost straight away into my mind. And shortly after that a framework for seven sessions on ministry in general from the book of Titus crystalized out. Steve Jones’ (Drouin) experience was much the same, with five clearly worked sessions on how to use the Old Testament to preach Jesus Christ.

And so it came to be that just after Easter, Steve and I found ourselves on the way to Lusaka for a busy fortnight of ministry, presenting to almost 100 pastors in the CCAP-Zambia, and preaching to refreshingly enthusiastic local congregations located deep within mazes of narrow, dusty, pot-holed streets and at the end of bumpy country roads. And both of us in our “dog-collars”!

Zambia is a poor country materially, but far richer in spiritual tone than Australia. There is a happiness, contentment and sense of community there that surely flows out of the 90-95% of the population that still identify as Christian in their census. The fruit of David Livingstone’s vision of a gospel that should impact the structures of society as well as individual lives continues, and the 150th

anniversary of his death was observed variously while we were there.

The CCAP is just one of the evangelical denominations that flowed on from early African missionary work. It comprises 5 synods in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia which relate in a federal structure somewhat similar to the way the State churches function here in Australia. Of these, the Zambian Synod is probably the closest to us.

Links with the CCAP-Z were established by Rev. Bob Thomas back in 2004 during his time as Moderator General, and the “Bob Thomas tree” planted in the grounds of the Chasefu Theological College is testimony to their appreciation of the encouragement Australia has given them. Since then a stream of visitors have been instrumental in confirming and strengthening the partnership, with Rev. John Wilson a well-loved regular and Rev. Corrie Nel (Roseville, NSW) currently providing an “intensive” week of at Chasefu for the next few years through APWM. Though a bit out of the way of the Zambian mainstream, Chasefu is itself a legacy of early missionary work. It is built on the grounds of an early Free Church of Scotland mission station which the Colonial government confiscated before independence but which was later returned to the CCAP-Z by their own government.

Overall, we were wonderfully received, and just as refreshed and encouraged ourselves as our fellow pastors professed to be in their comments and feedback to us. God is at work deepening and strengthening the lives of faithful believers in a land (and continent) where so much Christianity is shallow and tied to the promise of prosperity.

As one pastor put it, “We lose our people to these prosperity preachers, and then when it does not work, we are there to pick them up again. It is hard.”

Yes, faithful gospel ministry is hard. But it has always been so. Titus was sent to Crete that he might “set in order what remains,” and for that his hope was not in anything other than the grace of God, because that was the only thing that could sustain the patient-winsome long-term vision required. And Titus’ preaching, correcting and rebuking would have grown out of the promises of God in the Old Testament just as much as the apostolic declaration of their fulfilment in the life, death resurrection and ascension of Jesus which we now have in the New Testament.

Do pray for the Zambian Churches and the growth of the CCAP-Z in particular because their deep grounding in the reformed faith cannot help but bring a stability to that nation, and hopefully beyond. And if opportunity arises, please consider supporting them materially. In earthly terms they have so little yet their vision and perseverance is inspiring. Doubtless they would be amazed at all the resources we have, but perhaps also amazed that we seem to do so little with it all. So as we pray for them, we will surely find that God stirs us up to be here what we desire them to be over there.



PASTORS AT LUKSAKA RETREAT



STEVE, SEVATT KABAGHE (GENERAL SECRETARY CCAP ZAMBIA), GRAHAM



CHASEFU THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE – CHASEFU



EVERYDAY EVANGELISM: ON THE ROAD WITH WMV

Often the idea of sharing our faith with others makes us nervous because we don't know what to say, or makes us feel guilty because we're avoiding it. The On the Road; Everyday Evangelism conference, run by Women's Ministries Victoria in Shepparton on Saturday 29th April, and in Pakenham on 17th June, has been a wonderful time for women of the PCV to challenge themselves to see the importance of being involved in evangelism, and understand that we don't need to avoid it or feel incapable when seeking to share our trust in Jesus with friends and family.

During the main sessions, Kathryn Gatt, the PCV Women's Ministries Facilitator, spoke on why women should evangelise, and how we can engage in evangelism. We looked at the example of Peter and John in Acts 4, boldly declaring the gospel before the Sanhedrin, as well as three vignettes from the book of John; Andrew inviting Simon Peter, Phillip inviting Nathanael, and Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman, who goes on to invite her community. Each of these accounts reminded us of the importance of inviting others to come and see Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour of the World.

Food, fellowship, and further investigation into specific topics related to evangelism made up the rest of the conference. Attendees were able to attend one of three elective workshops to think through how to grow in evangelism.

Evangelism in Practice helped women think through what holds them back from engaging in evangelism, what strategies they could use to overcome these hesitations and what practical steps to take to start being faithful in evangelism. Evangelism in the Home looked at the many different ways that we can use our home and hospitality to invite others into the kingdom. Evangelism and Prayer discussed the vital role of prayer when we seek to share our faith with others, and when, where and how we can regularly be praying for others to hear the good news. Thanks to the workshop leaders; Jenny Price, Laurel Hall, Su Ingleton, Jo Watson, Sarah Weber and Louise Griffiths for their work in preparing and presenting these workshops.

On the Road can't happen without the diligent work of many people to bring the conference to fruition. Many thanks to Rachel Rath and her very capable team, supported by Pastor Kyung Ee, who all worked tirelessly to make the day at Shepparton run smoothly, and to Kirsten Harvey and her fantastic team from New Life Officer, supported by Pastor Dave Martin, who did a wonderful job organising the event at Pakenham.

On the Road: Everyday Evangelism will also be held in Warrnambool on 9th September. More information can be found at the Women's Ministries Victoria website www.wmv.org.au/conferences

ANZAC DAY AT BELTANA WITH PIM

In April, Colin and Alison Morrow from PIM's Mungo Patrol had the privilege of travelling to Beltana, South Australia, to conduct their ANZAC Day dawn service.

The outback town of Beltana is where John Flynn was ministering at the Smith of Dunesk Mission in 1911-1912 when he wrote his report to the Presbyterian Church of Australia regarding the need for outback ministry. His report was presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1912 and resulted in the formation of Australian Inland Mission, now continuing as Presbyterian Inland Mission.

Colin and Alison were able to organise the service with the invaluable aid of Jan Ferguson, OAM, from the Beltana Progress Association. Jan put in a huge effort in the lead up to ANZAC Day and the small Beltana community rallied to the cause to make the day a success.

The service began as the sun was making an appearance over the horizon at 6:30 am. There were around 50 people in attendance (not bad for a town with a population of 26!). People had travelled from many places to attend. We were able

to read from Scripture, sing hymns, pray and the Gospel was presented. Members of the community laid a wreath and raised the flags from half-mast. The traditional Last Post and Reveille were played and the Ode of Remembrance recited. The service finished as all present joined in singing the Australian National Anthem.

Although the music used during the ANZAC service was pre-recorded, following the service John O'Dea entertained those present with live music and song.

Following the service, the Beltana Progress Association had organised a breakfast in Beltana's Assembly Hall. We were able to share with people from the local area, from Adelaide, from interstate and from overseas. There were many stories to be shared and PIM were made welcome.

Although it is a long time since John Flynn was in Beltana, it is a joy to know that there are still opportunities to share the Gospel. Let us pray that the Lord will work in the hearts of those present on ANZAC Day and with the people with whom we shared.



REVIEW:

PAUL AND HIS FRIENDS IN LEADERSHIP: HOW THEY CHANGED THE WORLD

REVIEWED BY ROB PAIX



HOW THEY CHANGED THE WORLD

Paul W. Barnett

*Paul W. Barnett,
Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2017.*

This book stood neglected on my shelf for many months before I finally got it down to read it. What prompted me was reading Aimee Byrd’s *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. In seeking to shake up some of the prevailing paradigms for understanding “manhood” and “womanhood,” even under a male-only eldership schema, Byrd made much of (among other things) the NT figure of Phoebe. I thought it would be good to compare thoughts on Phoebe from a work that was not so polemical - like this slender volume from Barnett. More on Phoebe later.

Author Paul Barnett would be well-known to many for his methodical approach to biblical history and his sober exegesis. Not so well-known on this occasion is his publisher. Certainly I had never heard of BRF (Bible Reading Fellowship) as a publisher. I trust this book has not suffered from lack of publicity. In terms of content and length though, this book is highly accessible and easy to read.

All of us would be at least vaguely aware of the many men and women Paul mentions throughout his letters. When we add in the book of Acts we find nearly 100 people named as being in some way associated with Paul, nearly forty of whom were closely involved in his mission. For this book, Barnett has selected the twenty-four of those about whom we have the most information. What he does for us is bring together all that we are told about each person from across the pages of the NT and set that within the broader outline of Paul’s ministry in its various phases. In this way he creates a brief sketch of these men and women as friends and co-labourers with the Apostle. Barnett draws on his expertise in the first-century historical background to tell us about, for instance, what someone called a “patron” would have been and done in Paul’s day. However, it is in this area (as we shall see) that we need to take particular care not to overreach.

Barnett's purpose in this book is to instruct and inspire us in our practices of leadership, friendship and teamwork as we engage in the mission of the church today. One of the keys to understanding Paul's greatness, says Barnett, is to see how he multiplied his efforts through a network of colleagues who were "dedicated personally to Paul, but were also "effective ministers in their own right" (p.31). After three introductory chapters on Paul and his life and mission, the bulk of the remainder of the book divides Paul's friends into the four main phases of Paul's ministry plus his final years. The sketch of each person concludes with a reflection on what we can learn from Paul's mission partnership with him or her. A couple of these reflections also include illustrative instances from later church history.

Titus and Timothy, unsurprisingly, receive the most coverage. However, I would like to mention some of the lesser-known people. There is Silvanus the missionary and translator who also worked with Peter, married couple Priscilla and Aquila the house church leaders and wealthy supporters of the missionary enterprise, Stephanas - "an inspiration to take church membership seriously" (p. 66), and Erastus the high-ranking city official. And it was not always smooth sailing relationally as the case of John Mark shows.

Aristarchus was a faithful travelling companion whom Paul described as a "fellow-worker" and a "comfort." As for Paul's words about his kinsfolk Andronicus and Junia, Barnett prefers the reading "well known among the apostles," and goes on to say that "apostle" here is to be understood in the broader sense of a missionary who had personally seen the resurrected Lord Jesus. Onesiphorus was a man of means who was known for his service in his own hometown of Ephesus. When he was in Rome (perhaps on business?) he took the initiative to find Paul in prison so that he could support and encourage him.

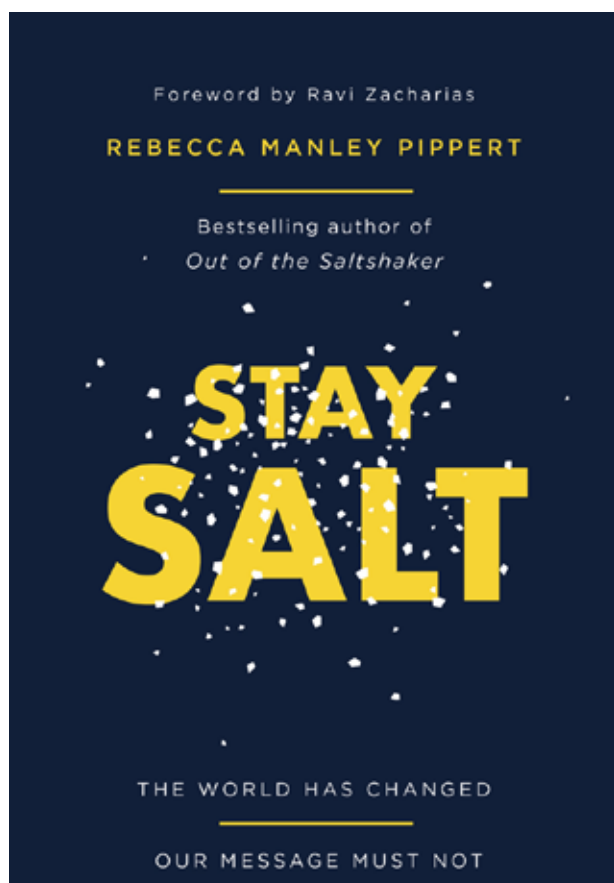
What about Phoebe? She was a patroness to Paul and other travelling missionaries and she opened her home to the church in Cenchrae. What is remarkable about Phoebe is that she "takes her place alongside male apostolic delegates privileged to carry letters to the churches." (p. 96) Paul entrusted Phoebe with delivering his letter to the Romans - a task, says Barnett, that would have included both reading the letter out to the house churches and explaining and clarifying its message. However, I recently heard Dr Peter Head, an expert in ancient letters, tell John Dickson ("Undeceptions" Podcast Episode 102) that there is no evidence suggesting that a letter-carrier was also the one who would read out the letter. In any case, Phoebe was certainly tasked with ensuring the letter was received and regarded as a genuine and authoritative communication from the Apostle, and that is why he gives her such a lofty commendation (Romans 16:1-2).

The book finishes with a brief chapter on Paul's teaching about love and then a reflection on the significance of Paul's mission friends. I was struck by the variety of men and women and the many different ways they participated in Paul's Gospel mission. And I feel as though I know them a little better, especially those "lesser" ones - they are no longer "flat" characters. *Paul and His Friends in Leadership* is not only a great encouragement in ministry, it also shows how all of us can and should work together to promote the Gospel. In the PCV we claim to be clear on the calling, preparation and role of the ordained minister. Are we clear on emulating Paul in valuing a variety of ministries and cultivating a network of "friends in leadership?"

Rob Paix is an elder at Dandenong Presbyterian Church

REVIEW: STAY SALT

REVIEWED BY SARAH MCDONALD



Stay Salt: Rebecca Manley Pippert
Good Book Company 2020: 256 pages
ISBN: 1784984361

Stay Salt is written by Becky Pippert who has lived in and trained Christians how to evangelise in six continents. She realises that if we are to reach out with the Gospel, we also need to reach in with the Gospel, into our hearts and minds. To be credible messengers of the Gospel we have to understand and truly believe the Gospel ourselves. Our emphasis must never be on numbers or techniques, formulas or manipulation, but on authenticity, credibility and spiritual power.

The structure of the book comes from the three most common reasons we don't share the Gospel winsomely:

1. We feel inadequate.
2. We think we don't know enough.
3. We lack confidence.

So, she gives us three Ms that answer those concerns:

1. We are the means that Christ uses to share the Gospel and that is adequate.
2. We have to know and believe that, in the message of Gospel, we have a better story that answers our culture's gospels.
3. We have a method of evangelism to learn from Jesus and the early church

I really love that she punctuates her book with real life examples of where she won people over and where she was rejected.

But this isn't only a 'how-to' book. Becky lays a Biblical foundation that informs and motivates evangelism.

My three favourite quotes are:

"Jesus did not say 'Go therefore all you extraverts, all of you with dynamic communication skills, and all of you gifted as evangelists, and make disciples. The rest of you just hang out, sing some hymns, and wait until I return.' No, Jesus commands and calls every Christian." (page 167)

Becky quotes from Rico Tice's book *Honest Evangelism*: "What is successful witnessing? It's not someone becoming a Christian. It's someone hearing about Christ. You have not failed if you

explain the Gospel and are rejected. You have failed if you don't try." (page 173)

And "The Bible is clear that the focus of the church must be not only on maintenance but also on mission. And the focus of a church's ministers must be not only on pastoral care of the congregation but also on equipping its members on evangelism." (page 232)

I encourage you to read *Stay Salt* because it reassures us and equips us to follow in the footsteps of the great evangelist, Jesus.

Sarah McDonald is a member of Benalla Presbyterian Church and reviewed Stay Salt for the WMV On the Road Conference at Shepparton on 29th April.



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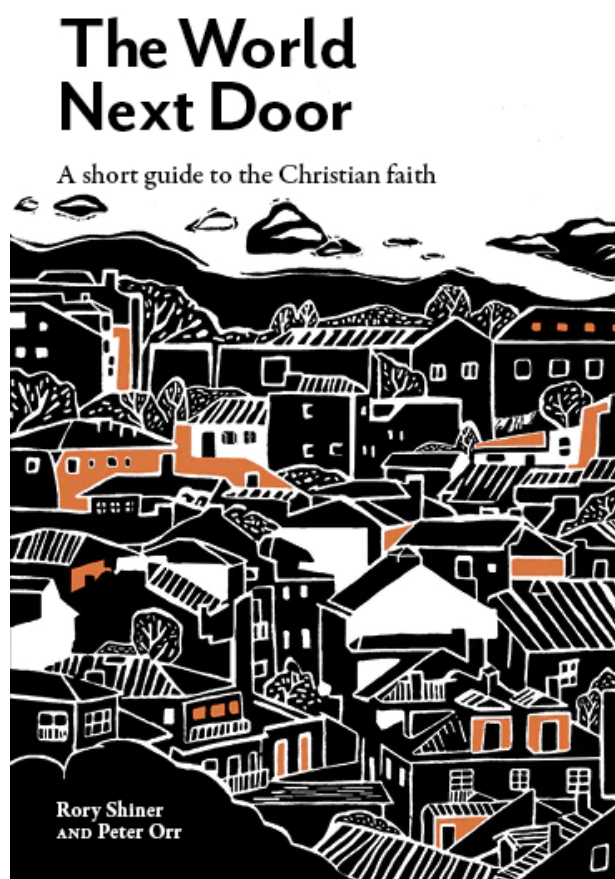
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#thisismotherhood

REVIEW:

THE WORLD NEXT DOOR

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN MCDONALD



The World Next Door: A Short Guide to the Christian Faith
Rory Shiner and Peter Orr
Matthias Media (2021)
ISBN: 9781925424720

“Jesus was an exorcist.” Is that where you would you start explaining what you believe?

Of course that’s not all Jesus is. But it’s where Rory Shiner and Peter Orr choose to begin in *The World Next Door: A Short Guide to the Christian Faith*.

The title is a tribute to James Sires’ excellent book *The Universe Next Door*, in which he introduced Christians to the thinking of their non-Christian neighbours. In *The World Next Door*, Shiner and Orr attempt to do the opposite: “This book is our best shot at commending the Christian message to our friends.” (page 7)

They achieve their purpose by outlining what Christians have always believed, as stated in the Apostles’ Creed. Each chapter addresses a doctrine from the creed in a way that someone with little or no Christian background would understand. Shiner and Orr make good use of illustrations and helpfully explain profound concepts in ways that our neighbours would understand.

To return to where we started, there is one significant departure from the outline of the Creed right at the start with a chapter on demons. Right up front they make the point that the Bible is grounded in real, historical events in this world. “Many of its places and characters can be cross-checked on the historical record.” (p7). But Shiner and Orr dive right in by addressing the supernatural aspects of the Bible. It’s an unusual angle, but it works well.

Shiner does suggest that demons might not be fallen angels, but rather the spirits of dead people (a view he picked up from Peter Bolt), though Orr isn't convinced (see pages 19-20). But this speculation doesn't mar an otherwise very helpful introduction to Christian beliefs.

Shiner and Orr address many of the common criticisms of Christianity, including the alleged similarity of the virgin birth to other religions (pages 52-54), whether Jesus thought or taught that He was God (pages 62-63), and whether it matters if Jesus really rose from the dead (pages 83-90).

The chapters are mostly ten pages long, which is enough to engage with the present cultural understanding on the topic, unpack what God's Word teaches, and show that the Christian view makes better sense of our world.

But it's not just information for information's sake. Shiner closes the book with this appeal:

"If you have read this far, then there's a choice for you to make. Like it or not, you're now no longer in the 'I had no idea' camp. One choice would be to ignore it all and move on, like a patient ignoring a serious diagnosis from their doctor (bad decision). Or you could say you need more time, more information, more discussion. That would be a better decision, with the caveat that we can sometimes fool ourselves into thinking we need more discussion, information, or time, when what we are really doing is choosing the first option in a way we can live with.

Or it is entirely possible that based on what you know, you could make the decision to follow Jesus right now. We (that is, you and I) are also in the creed. We are among its cast of characters, along

with God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary and Pilate. We are captured in the pronoun 'I'. And we are invited to do one thing, and one thing only: believe. "I believe" is the part assigned to us.' (page 139).

For all those reasons, *The World Next Door* is great to give to (or read with) a thoughtful non-Christian friend.

It is also helpful for Christians to consider how to get our message across to people who are almost completely Biblically illiterate. So *The World Next Door* would be great to read as a book club or apologetics group, or as background reading for evangelism training.

And it is certainly worth Christians reading *The World Next Door* for our own benefit. In addition to thinking some more about how the spiritual world relates to the physical world, I especially benefitted from chapter 11 on the church (pages 113-121) and chapter 12 on forgiveness (pages 122-132).

If you're looking for an introduction to the Apostle's Creed that has been put together for believers, you could also try the series by R.C. Sproul at Ligonier.org or the course from TGC.

I'll definitely return to *The World Next Door* when planning a teaching series through the Apostles' Creed. It's a helpful resource to think about communicating the Gospel to people with a quickly-shrinking cultural memory of Christianity.

Stephen McDonald is the minister of the Benalla Regional Parish

A PLURALITY OF PREACHERS

MURRAY CAPILL

Many churches are committed to the concept of a plurality of elders. That is to say, the local church is not led by the pastor alone, but by a team of leaders. The elders, as a body, are shepherds and overseers of the flock, the local church. Interestingly, the norm in many churches committed to that principle is for there to only be one preacher. There's a plurality of elders, but a single preacher. But is that healthy? And is it biblical? Should the "plurality" principle apply to preachers as well?

The classic text for making a distinction between elders who "rule" or lead, and those among them who are particularly gifted to preach and teach, is 1 Timothy 5:17. Paul says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching." He goes on to talk about not muzzling the ox while it is treading out the grain, establishing the principle that the worker is worthy of his wages. It is appropriate, he is saying, to financially support church workers. In fact, this remuneration is often seen as the "double" honour—there's the honour of respect and also the honour of remuneration. That's double honour. [1]

With this understanding, a model has developed where local churches have a plurality of elders, one of whom is set aside, and financially supported, to preach and teach as his full-time work. But is that what Paul envisioned? It seems significant that the "double honour" is spoken of in regard to elders who rule well, even if it is especially fitting for those who preach. And he does not then speak of "especially the one" who teaches and preaches, but "especially those" who preach and teach. His words suggest that not all the elders specifically labour in preaching and teaching, but they also suggest that multiple elders might.

There may well be a plurality of preachers among the plurality of elders.

In larger churches with multiple paid pastors that is, of course, what happens. But most churches are smaller and have only one paid minister. He's expected to preach most weeks, with a few weeks' holiday and perhaps the occasional swap with another minister or guest preacher to help out. So one person provides over 80% of the preaching ministry.

While that model has provided well for the needs of many churches and been sustainable for many preachers, it is worth asking, is it really best? Is it the healthiest model for preachers and for churches? Or should a belief in the principle of a plurality of elders be matched by a commitment to a plurality of preachers?

THE MANY BENEFITS OF A PLURALITY OF PREACHERS

I'd like to suggest that a plurality of preachers is the healthiest pattern for most churches. While perhaps not always achievable, it is a healthy goal for a number of reasons:

- It helps avoid the risk of a church being overly dependent on one person. A church with a plurality of elders is not a one-man show. But because of the significance of the preaching ministry in church life, the focus easily moves toward the preaching elder.
- There are benefits to hearing the word through more than one person. Each preacher brings their own insights, preaches with their own style, and connects in different ways to different people.



It uses and develops the gifts of many. It is unlikely, even in a fairly small church, that the minister is the only person with public teaching gifts.

- It is healthy for the preacher to sit under the ministry of the word, being fed by others, at least occasionally. We believe that is important for everyone else in the church, and it is important for the minister too.
- When the minister doesn't have to prepare a new sermon, he can spend additional time digging his well deeper for ongoing word ministry, undertake advance preparation for an upcoming series, or invest into other areas of ministry.
- Preachers are able to share the load with each other. They can help carry each other's burdens in times of greater stress, weariness, or harder seasons of life.
- A group of preachers can be raised up to provide for other churches in your city or region, who might be without a preacher.
- Sharing the preaching load with others in the church might lessen the singular public focus on the minister alone, and might reduce the feeling of pressure and of being alone in his tasks.

- I have also seen this prove to be a blessing in those cases when a church is without a minister for a period of time. The church is not suddenly stuck, but already has a pool of other known and loved in-house preachers, who can step in, to at least supplement supply preachers.

It's healthier. But is it achievable? Is it possible for even a small church to have several preachers?

RAISING UP A PLURALITY OF PREACHERS

It is likely that in a smaller church there will only be one full-time pastor. But if part of his mandate is not only to preach but to equip others to preach (as one outworking of Eph 4:11-12 and 2 Tim 2:2), then over time, a pool of preachers can be raised up.

To achieve that, many churches, sometimes working together, establish a preaching group where a few people come together to study biblical texts and learn how to structure a message, develop sound applications, and communicate in public. They may begin by preparing short talks and presenting them, giving feedback and learning from each other, while being coached by the pastor. [2] Over time, some will show capacity to prepare a longer message, and then eventually preach in church.

People who are trained in this way will typically grow spiritually through doing this. They will likely deepen in their biblical knowledge, and their concern for the church and the gospel, and also be driven to their knees in prayer. It will grow their understanding of preaching, of the Bible, of good communication, and of what is involved in feeding the flock. It may well grow the ability of elders to give feedback on the minister's preaching, and it may also increase their empathy for him as they discover first-hand the demands of preaching.

Some may preach just once or twice a year, while others may have time and capacity to preach more often, perhaps even preach a short series of their own. In a very small church, you don't have to be an amazing public speaker to stand in front of a few people and open up an edifying message from God's word. When a church is a bit larger, more developed gifts are needed to speak to a greater number of people, but the pool of people to draw from is also larger.

Once a few men have begun preaching at church, still others may be encouraged to consider learning to preach as well. Preaching won't be seen as the domain of just one person, but as one of the gifts God might give to several people, for the upbuilding of the body. Those who show marked giftedness should then be encouraged to consider going further, perhaps undertaking formal

theological training in order to devote themselves to full-time work as a pastor or gospel worker. It is one thing to preach an occasional sermon; it is another thing to preach week in and week out, year after year. To do that well it is valuable to undertake in-depth theological training. But it may be the occasional preaching that leads on to theological study and life-long preaching.

Of course great care should be taken in inviting people to preach. It is a large responsibility that has a huge impact on the wellbeing of the church. Those who are trained for this work need to be sound in doctrine, apt to teach, and godly in their daily lives. But they are the qualifications for all the elders, so it is not outlandish to think that more elders, and perhaps some others who are aspiring to eldership, might be able to test, develop, and regularly exercise their gifts to preach.

It therefore seems biblical, healthy, and wise for a church to develop not only a plurality of elders, but a plurality of preachers.

[1] In Reformed and Presbyterian churches there are varying views on the relationship of elders and ministers, and whether "minister" is a separate office or not.

[2] Such training groups can also be a great help in equipping women in complementarian churches to minister the word well to other women or children.

*Murray Capill teaches practical theology at Reformed Theological College, Melbourne. He previously pastored churches in New Zealand and Australia for 15 years, and was the principal of RTC for 12 years. He is the author of *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour* (2004) and *The HEar is the Target* (2024). Murray is married to Wendy and they have five adult children and a number of grandchildren.*

(with permission TGC - The Gospel Coalition Australia)



WATCH THIS SPACE!

On Saturday 1 July, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) gained access to a new ministry hub at 690 Elgar Road. Stakeholders gathered for a celebratory brunch and the Moderator, Rev. Peter Phillips, opened the site with a word of prayer.

The large building adjoining the Presbyterian Theological College (PTC) has been on the market for many years but has not sold. In May, the Commission of the General Assembly of Victoria approved a 6-year lease with the view of purchasing the property if sufficient funds can be raised.

For many years, the whole site was home to the Christian Service Centre where Dawn Martin and a team of others cared for children with serious disabilities.

In 1986, the PTC bought a portion of the site (684 Elgar Road) with the remaining portion becoming part of the Royal District Nursing Service. PTC extended their original building in 1990. The Swanton Library was expanded to its current size in 1996 but is now bursting at the seams. Residential units were added in 2008.

Meanwhile, 690 Elgar Road has been on the market for several years — and on the radar of the PTC Property Manager, Cameron Weir, who foresaw the opportunity for the PCV to reunite the original site and provide space for several vital ministries presently scattered across Melbourne.

The PCV Archives will be the central tenant, with a facility large enough to house the entire collection of church historical records in one location. The fire last year at South Yarra Presbyterian Church significantly impacted the operations of the Archives with the office forced to close and the records moved to three disparate locations and largely inaccessible. The need for a single location has always been a pressing issue and the new premises will help establish the Archives as a viable and vital church institution well into the foreseeable future.

In addition, the Melbourne East Christian Counselling Centre will relocate from smaller premises at Donvale Presbyterian Church and occupy the South wing of the building complete with public reception area and waiting room.

The PTC will also use space to store the overflow of their library collection while it fundraises for a much larger (and strikingly designed) library next door at 684 Elgar Road.

Even with each of these ministries relocating to a collective site, there is still space unallocated with ample room for two more tenants. So, watch this space to see how 690 Elgar Road will become a Presbyterian hub for gospel ministries.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL RISKE FROM ROCHESTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

STEPHEN MCDONALD

1. What can you tell us about your life, your conversion, and your preparation for ministry?

I'm married to Lauren and we have 3 children: Abigail (7), Elijah (5), and Joseph (3). We are currently serving at Rochester Presbyterian Church. We have been here just a bit over 5 months.

Lauren and I were both born and raised in Tasmania. I became a Christian during my uni years at UTas doing a Bachelor of Social Work. In my second year, a dear friend invite me to AFES. He invited me to attend the mid-year conference on the sovereignty of God and I was converted there. I said to him, 'I need to find a church that teaches God's Word.'

During that time, I still had five years studying social work. I thought I couldn't be a Christian and do social work. When I asked for a placement, I said I could go anywhere but I didn't want to go to the LGBTI centre because it conflicted with my Christian faith. One of my professors told me, 'If you can't leave your faith at the door, leave it behind. If you can't, maybe this isn't the job for you.'

I really jumped into ministry when I got converted. My minister at the time asked me if I would be interested in doing a ministry apprenticeship with the Ministry Training Scheme. I did, with a focus on chaplaincy and church-based ministry. During those 2 years of MTS, God was making it clear that I should be doing church-based ministry. So, Lauren and I started exploring college options and we ended up going to Christ College in Sydney, a decision made for us by the presbytery.

We really wanted to know that this was not just an internal calling, but also an external calling. So approval from the Session at Cornerstone Hobart and from the Presbytery through the candidacy process was important.

2. Following your time at Christ College, you returned to your home church to work and study part time. What did you learn from that experience?

I was in Sydney for 3 years, but I did my last year back in Tassie studying and working part time at Cornerstone in 2020. Our minister at the time, Campbell Markham, didn't want to throw me in the deep end after 4 years at college. The plan was to do it over a longer time, but with COVID I was able to get it done in 12 months.

In October 2020, Campbell Markham needed to go back to Perth and the church went into vacancy. Despite having been Campbell's assistant, I stuck around as a Session appointment until February 2022 when our new minister Mark Powell arrived from Sydney.

I really appreciated the experience of working with an interim moderator who took on some of the big picture responsibilities. It meant I could ease into ministry without having all of the responsibility. I was able to do a lot of the day-to-day activities of a minister without some of the wider responsibilities outside the local church.



3. What's it been like moving from Tasmania to Victoria?

Having lived in Sydney we certainly weren't looking to move to another capital city. We definitely wanted to be in the country. Rochester has a pace of life that we thought would really suit us. But the pace of ministry has been very different to what we had expected. We arrived in Rochester about 3 months after most of the town was flooded.

4. How has the flooding affected the life and ministry of the congregation in Rochester?

Rochester usually has a population of 3000 people. But at the moment, only 30% are living in town. Those 900 aren't necessarily in their homes, but may be living in caravans or sheds. The community is in a weird season.

The flood aftermath is very much ongoing. Some people have been blessed that insurance companies have got involved. People are moving back into their houses maybe in the next month, some still have work about to start, and many have no idea when the insurance companies will get to them.

Out of all the big buildings in Rochester the church building fared best. So for the first few months there were a lot of government and community services operating from the church and hall. Since February the church has been meeting in a café while work is done on our building. Hopefully, in July or August we'll be back to meeting in one of our meeting rooms. Work on the church and hall won't be completed until some time next year.

In the congregation there are many faithful people, but the whole situation has been wearing on everyone. I expect that the next 6 to 12 months will still be very hard, if not worse than the first 6 months. Most people are waiting for some 'normal' to return.

5. How can the PCV pray for you and the people in Rochester?

Please pray that in the midst of all this we as God's people will continue to draw close to Christ, find our strength and joy and comfort in Him and that we would continue to be patient and resilient.

For our community please pray that the Lord would use even this disaster for good and that in the midst of hopelessness people would find hope in Him.



TRAINING FOR CROSS CULTURAL MISSION IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Are you eager to love your cross-cultural neighbour as yourself but feel unprepared? Does fear of saying or doing the wrong thing hold you back? Are you interested in learning more about the shift in missions today, and how your giftings can be used to open up opportunities for the gospel? Maybe you want to discover who is in your neighbourhood, or simply how to connect with a refugee. Does your church want to be revitalised and grow? Have you considered that immigration may be part of God's plan for the revival of the church in our nation?

If any of these are true for you then the Pioneers Melbourne Diaspora Team would love to offer you training and support. Challenged with the question, "Who is my neighbour?", Jesus' response established that our neighbours are not just those we love and trust, but rather the stranger, the foreigner, and even the enemy.

Today Australia is becoming home to a diversity of people from around the world. These diaspora people speak differently, act differently, and even believe differently to ourselves. But rather than ignoring or stepping around them, as the religious leaders in Jesus' parable did, we must sacrificially love them and care for them, for the sake of Christ.

TALUA PRINCIPAL LAWAK NOW WITH CHRIST

It is with profound sadness that APWM reports the sudden death on 21st April of Pastor Christopher Lawak, Principal of the Talua Theological Training Institute in Vanuatu.

He was a husband to Napip, and a father and friend to many. We mourn the loss of this godly leader who loved the Lord Jesus and the gospel. In recent days he was excited at the project to install solar power at Talua because of the way in which that would help Talua grow in its mission.



In the past, engaging in cross-cultural mission meant travelling to another country. But now the mission field has also come to our own neighbourhoods. Reaching out across cultures used to be only for the few 'professional' missionaries. But now, more than ever before, all Aussie Christians can participate in this mission because diaspora people are all around us.

Be encouraged and equipped for doing global ministry in your neighbourhood through:

- Keynote talks & breakout groups
- Practical elective workshops
- Discovering resources

Watch this space for more details about an event near you or contact Paul on 0490 483 184 or Anthea on 0490 452 819 (email pantheals@gmail.com) to discuss training opportunities for your church or group.

While we mourn and struggle with this development, we remain confident that God is at work even through this. Please uphold his family and the Talua community in prayer



TIMOR LESTE: CHRIST IS BUILDING HIS CHURCH

Christ continues to build Church, and that is certainly the case with our partner in Timor Leste — the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Over the last 10 years it has been a joy to see this church grow in its vision and capacity.

Ninety percent of East Timorese are Roman Catholic and so many do not often welcome the work of the Presbyterian Church, and yet the church continues to bear witness to Christ — often in far-flung places.

Kevin Murray and Robert Duncanson (Grace Presbyterian Church, Ballarat) recently travelled to Timor Leste for discussions with the church leadership about the resources they need to carry out their ministry.

Working with the church are Chris & Julie Dean, who have made great progress in language and relationships. Chris and Julie were previously in parish ministry in Warragul, Victoria.

The trip was also an opportunity to visit outlying congregations that can take anywhere from two to ten hours to reach in a four-wheel drive vehicle on unsealed roads. The fact that we are interested in this church encourages its members to be faithful in a culture where the gospel and local culture easily collide.

Please keep praying that gospel might take a firm hold in Timor Leste. If you would like to support this ministry so that it can expand, then please contact our office.



SUPPORTING MATT & KATE VINICOMBE



We praise God for the many people who have donated toward the purchase of a house for Matt & Kate Vinicombe following their serious car accident on Christmas Day. Our goal is to raise \$800,000.

If you would still like to make a donation there are two ways to do so:

Card

Online via their mission agency, the Church

Missionary Society

<https://donate.cms.org.au/vinicombemk>

Direct Deposit

Bank: Westpac

Account name: CMS Victoria

BSB: 033-112

Account number: 280677

Reference: Your first name initial and surname (e.g. J Citizen); missionary surname (Vinicombes)

And please send an email to CMS so a receipt can be sent to you.

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