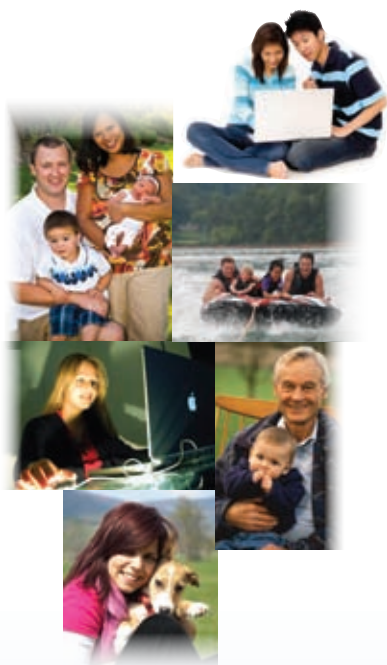


InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement



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Subscriptions

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Past Issues

Past issues of the journal are available at:
<http://www.klesisinstitute.com/intersections.html>

Editorial

In addition to subscriptions from Australia, we are heartened by the number of overseas subscriptions for *InterSections*. We think this indicates the interest in the work in Australia, particularly from the USA, UK and our neighbours in the Pacific region. Locally, we know that there are many Christians who still have not heard of *InterSections*, so if you think the journal is worthwhile, please help spread the word. We send *InterSections* to email subscribers (free) and print subscribers (AUD\$22 per year for 4 issues).

We hope you will find this third edition of *InterSections* edifying. In this issue we survey the overseas mission work supported by Australian churches. For our *ChurchScope* article, Greg Wells provides an overview of Lindisfarne Church of Christ in Tasmania. Brett Christensen offers us *Food for Thought* on songs of the church, encouraging more Australians to write our own spiritual songs. This issue's *Letter from America* comes from Gordon Hogan, former missionary in residence at Harding University who has made many trips to Australia. In addition we have an interview with Ian Coker and several news items.

Please do not be just a passive reader of *InterSections*. Perhaps you are prompted to email us with a response to something you read. Perhaps you want to contact a writer to get more information or share your thoughts. Perhaps you want to discuss something you read with your own church family. *InterSections* is a journal for Christian encounter and encouragement, and we urge you to meet with and encourage others. ■

Overseas Missions Support



Australian churches support overseas missions.

After World War II Australia was seen as a mission field by churches in the USA. Although the influx of missionaries from the USA peaked at over 50, it began to decline sharply from the 1980's, but some still visit regularly and a number of local preachers continue to receive financial support from the USA. Notwithstanding the millions of dollars that poured into Australia to support workers and build meeting places, from early on churches here were encouraged to include support for overseas missions in their budgets and even send workers to other countries.

Today, while the number of Australians involved in anything more than very short-term evangelistic trips overseas are few, (to our knowledge just one, Andrew Kelly), most churches continue to include financial support for overseas missions in their budgets. Gordon Hogan, recently retired as missionary-in-residence at Harding University, comments: 'I believe Australian congregations of the Lord's church are well positioned to be involved in overseas mission work, both with personnel and money... Involvement in evangelism outside your neighbourhood strengthens the local church and helps in avoiding strife that too often develops as a consequence of looking inward. More importantly it is simply what Jesus commands us to do (Matthew 28:18-20)'.

A number of countries have received our support, but they have been largely confined to poorer countries. These include PNG, Philippines, India, Vanuatu, Sri Lanka, Vietnam,

ChurchScope

Lindisfarne Church of Christ, TAS

God has richly blessed us with a depth of teachers and preachers who are also involved in teaching other congregations in Tasmania.

The Lindisfarne church meets at the Lindisfarne primary school on the Eastern Shore of Hobart in Tasmania. Currently the membership numbers 35 with over 50 meeting most Sundays. In 2002 there was an amalgamation of two smaller congregations meeting in Moonah and Lindisfarne who saw the benefits of coming together as one. After a three-week trial we all found it so encouraging that the decision to become one congregation was easy. Two years ago the remaining three members of the Glenorchy church also joined us after past differences were resolved.

The church here has made a purposeful attempt to strive after unity. Sadly there have been some serious divisions between brethren and certain congregations in Tasmania over many years. We have attempted to develop a congregation that focuses on love, service, truth and developing an encouraging, edifying environment. This culture has been deliberately pursued through our teaching programs. Our hope is that those who come to meet with us will be edified. We believe this is one of God's main purposes for his church.

Our involvement with other congregations has seen much more unity and fellowship amongst brethren in Tasmania. We have been involved with brethren from Launceston in developing a church camp during Easter, known as Camp Barnabas, which has provided an opportunity to develop bonds and fellowship with brethren from other congregations.

The church at Lindisfarne supports a number of overseas works such as those in Somalia, Vietnam, India and Zambia. This has had a powerful effect on our congregation, as we are exposed to the work of brethren in these countries and hear of their victories and their

daily challenges. Our involvement is by means of the study of God's Word through World Bible School, benevolence and prayer.

God has richly blessed us with a depth of teachers and preachers who are also involved in teaching other congregations in Tasmania. We have not adopted a one-teacher style ministry and currently have seven men on our teaching and preaching roster. We also have a number of women who are involved in teaching ladies bible classes and younger children. We have Bible classes that direct leadership amongst younger Christians and hold regular studies to help equip them for various works of ministry. This has resulted in some of our young men now taking on leadership roles within our congregation and elsewhere.

Evangelism is principally done through friendships that members have developed with people they know or meet.

This has resulted in a number of Bible studies and conversions. Our overriding belief is that if we build Christlike attributes among us, then God will move those who are seeking in our direction. People have found us sometimes through church advertising, but principally it has been by being invited to study or meet with us by

members. A number of our congregation assist the World Bible School, involving many Bible studies and leading to some conversions. In recent years a number of people in our congregation have also become involved with some people in the refugee community and with foster caring. This has created opportunities to share the gospel and has seen people in desperate need receive the love of Christ.

Our hope is to see elders appointed. We see this as an important next step and, God willing, hope to have suitably qualified men in this role in the not too distant future. ■

Currently the membership numbers 35 with over 50 meeting most Sundays.

Greg Wells is a member of the Lindisfarne church in Hobart, Tasmania. paravion@paravion.com.au

On Going Home

As vapour — that doth quickly fade from sight,
Is life's span on this plane we yet do dwell
'Til time is called for one to be in flight,
Returning whence they came — forbid'n to tell.

Fear strikes the heart of one who would deny
A life beyond the doors of darkest death,
Bringing sorrow — received have they the lie;
Accepting not, the One whose truth so saith.

Surely, the day is set for His to hear,
'Tis time to come home — you have served Me well.'
Those whispered words within the heark'ning ear
Bring lasting peace, for there's no fear to quell.

With ne'er a sigh — except it be content
To be thus released from this earthly tent.

Regi Nald

I write this not to boast but rather to encourage you and to suggest that you consider a similar effort.

Letter from America

'God bless you as we serve together in the greatest cause on earth.'

I enjoy writing letters, particularly when the content is encouraging and reflects blessings showered on God's people. In this case I want to share with you something we did last year in my congregation – the College Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas.

The College church is made up of just ordinary folks who love the Lord like you who read this. Our average per member income is about the same as yours. 2009 was the 75th year anniversary of the College church. From its beginning, the congregation has invested heavily in mission efforts all over the world. For many years we have sponsored and supported leaders and students who have been involved with many congregations in Australia, New Zealand and many other nations in summer evangelistic campaigns. We have been blessed for having done this and pray that you in Australia have been as well.

Having received many requests for assistance which we could not respond to from our regular budget, our mission committee decided that we would ask the congregation if they would approve the setting of one Sunday when a special contribution would be taken to fund these requests. The congregation embraced this, as well as the proposed amount of US\$365,000 to be given on 18 October 2009. Enthusiasm grew as the day approached. On that day, the amount given totalled US\$367,083.54. In addition, the regular contribution that day surpassed the weekly budgeted amount by almost US\$5,000. Praise God!

Plans are now underway to make this an annual event with the target for 2010 not yet determined, but hopefully

in excess of US\$400,000. I write this not to boast but rather to encourage you and to suggest that you consider a similar effort.

The week prior to October 18 I was reading the Apostle Paul's admonition to the church at Corinth and it seemed that by extension he was writing to me and the College church:

'I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through poverty might become rich. And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have (2 Corinthians 8: 8-12).'

God bless you as we serve together in the greatest cause on earth. ■



Gordon Hogan and his wife, Jane, former missionaries in Pakistan and Singapore, are regular visitors to Australia and New Zealand. Gordon recently retired as missionary-in-residence at Harding University and is an elder at the College Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas. ghogan@harding.edu

InterSections

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Ukraine and several African and South American nations. Of these, the first three have received the greatest support for the longest period of time. The nature of the support has also been varied. Most common has been financial support for local workers, (mainly a regular income, but also regular or one-off payments for other needs such as transportation and office equipment), or funds to build meeting places. Other forms of support have included support for orphans or orphan homes, Bible College tuition fees or student living expenses, Bibles, teaching materials, songbooks, an allowance to purchase bread and grape juice for assemblies, medical needs, setting up sustainable farming and disaster relief. Many brethren in Australia have also assisted with the World Bible School program by supervising students and marking their work.

Homes for orphans have attracted a lot of financial support. Gosford Church of Christ in NSW is the sponsoring congregation for Andrew and Jenny Kelly who, along with a board of directors, run the Jeremiah's Hope organisation in Ukraine. Jeremiah's Hope's mission is to share God's hope and practical help with orphans and at-risk youth in Ukraine. By investing in long-term relationships and ministering to their spiritual, emotional and physical needs, they seek to guide these children to become productive, Christian citizens in their home country where hope can easily be overtaken by despair due to poverty and alcohol abuse. (More information is available at <http://www.jeremiahshope.org/>.)

Another example is the South East congregation in Melbourne who support an Indian preacher, Billy Kumar, in the Andhra Pradesh district, and his congregation in Kakinadu who run an orphanage, one of many run by churches in India. The South East congregation has been appealing to other saints around Australia to help the orphans. Because these 23 children are taught the faith, the government offers no assistance to the orphanage, putting them at a financial disadvantage to secular orphan homes.

Since 2005 the Belmore Road Church of Christ has helped support the One Mile Clinic, Lae, Papua New Guinea. This is primarily a health clinic that serves both the physical and spiritual needs of the community. Velma Forman, a Canadian nurse, oversees this work.

The biggest contingent of Australian missionaries overseas was when Reg and Ruth Coles and Tom and Rens Bunt were in PNG during the 1970's and 1980's. Reg and Ruth have finished their work on earth, but Tom, (now with The Point Church), leads a team back to PNG every second year for a few weeks, (plans are in place for August this year with Tom being joined by Steve Collins, David Payne and others), and continues to keep in close contact with church leaders in PNG. Many local full-time preachers in PNG are now supported by churches in Australia. Often an indigenous preacher is supported by more than one church. In the past, too many of these supported preachers have gone "long-long", that is they lapse into immorality and worldliness. A leading self-supported

indigenous preacher has recently expressed the view that Western financial support for indigenous preachers has too often corrupted good men in PNG. We in the West do not understand all the ramifications financial support has in that culture. He suggested that the greatest need in PNG is for Bibles and song books (which are very expensive to purchase in PNG) and for teaching materials.

The corrupting influence of Western money has been experienced in other countries, especially the Philippines and India where it has often made preachers the wealthiest people in their village. Back in the late 1970's two American brethren, Ed Harrell and Tommy Porshe, barely escaped from the Philippines with their lives when they went to investigate supported preachers without notice. It emerged that some were completely fraudulent, but the money they received allowed them to hire congregations whenever they got notice of a visit from the USA! Regular reports they sent back to churches in the USA were complete fabrications. The difficulty for us is that not all recipients of Western funding are like this, but it can be difficult for us to know who is genuine and how much monetary support is really appropriate. Lito Batoon was a full-time worker in the Philippines for many years before moving to Brisbane, and he suggests, 'The most credible workers worthy of support are those who have first been self-supporting.'

In parts of India and the Philippines, some indigenous preachers seem to have become 'agents' for the funding of local preachers because of their contacts in Western countries. This gives them great local power as they effectively control who will be supported. Given the concerns raised about corruption, it is understandable that Western churches come to rely on local men they are accustomed to working with, but the potential dangers of this approach are also all too apparent.

Then there is also a problem when we from the West visit or work in a third-world country. It is a combination of the hangover of Western colonialism and our different way of life. Perhaps the best way to explain this is the way many of us feel when a prominent preacher travels to Australia and takes over the best suites of the most expensive hotel in each city. It can be especially hard to not come across as superior when the local people have become so accustomed to a colonial mentality and are so gracious in welcoming us that we are treated like kings and queens despite their poverty. Preachers who visit India often return with tales of the over-the-top way their visit has been promoted locally and the way they are introduced and received. The point in reporting this is not to discourage Western missionaries in third-world countries, but it is to call attention to the need for sensitive consideration of how we behave in these different cultures.

But in drawing attention to these issues, the further danger is that churches in Australia will be discouraged from involvement in overseas missions when the burden of the Great Commission should fall on we Christians in the wealthier nations. Indeed it can be argued that Australian churches have for too long leaned on the generous and diligent efforts of American missionaries in this part of the world. We should accept a greater responsibility to support



Food for Thought

Songs of the Church



To come up with words that teach and admonish is quite an art, and one needs to start with a good knowledge of God's word.

Does this sound familiar to you? A teenager complains to his father that most of what they sing at church is boring and uninspiring. The father doesn't see it that way, saying, 'They're good enough for your grandfather and me, and they're good enough for you.' But the son begs to differ, saying that the tunes are grating and the words mean little to him. 'Well, if you think they're so bad, let's see if you can do any better!' his father retorts. The son says he will, and goes and writes his first hymn.

That was in 1690. The teenager was Isaac Watts, who eventually wrote close to 350 hymns, among them *We're Marching to Zion*, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, *Our God, Our Help In Ages Past* and *Joy to the World*. Many of his songs have faded into history, but to Watts' credit, some still serve well in expressing our hearts' praise and dedication to God.

Music has been a part of human culture at least since Jubal's songs hit the charts, back in the days when rainbows were unheard of (Genesis 4:21). So it's no wonder that it has been central to God's people expressing their faith and feelings over the millennia. It certainly is so today. Singing is a trademark of disciples of Christ, and our songs say a lot about us.

Just as the music of a culture reflects the worldview of that culture (and a sad reflection that often is!), so do the songs of the church. But if Australians are predominantly using songs which are not ours — from other cultures and other faiths — our songs won't serve that key function of expressing our hearts, in our own language and style. Even songs written by God's people of a past generation can become foreign to us when the lyrics are hard to relate to, here and now. This generation of Australian disciples needs a few Isaac Wattses, or Davids and Asaphs.

At a time when our song list is largely driven by foreign and denominational music publishing companies, we need not only to write our own songs, but to share them amongst sister congregations across the continent. We major in importing songs, sometimes (though probably not enough) touching up the words and music to better suit us. But many songs don't transpose well from being sung with instrumental backing (for which they were written) to being sung by a group of voices worshipping in spirit and truth. We need a bigger repertoire of our own.

All over the world, people in Christ are coming up with their own songs, which express their own faith (rather than the beliefs of Pentecostals or Anglicans or evangelicals) in their own language. It's nothing new, of course, but with the tidal wave of material washing in from denominations, it is particularly refreshing.

Here in Australia, new songs are being written and shared. Usually the songs are the work of one person, but some collaboration is also happening. A Bible class in Canberra

was assigned the task of coming up with some songs about their topic, and came up with a couple. At the Macquarie School of Biblical Studies Lectureship 2009, in response to a light-hearted challenge, John Cooper from the Belmore Road Church of Christ penned words to a tune in less than 24 hours, and we enjoyed singing it together. So making up our own songs is not beyond us. Many won't be long-standing hits, but that was true of Wesley and Watts too. It's true of any era's songs.

The challenge of writing songs for God is that the words need to be able to carry themselves without instrumental accompaniment. The words and melody must fly on their own power. Another challenge for us here, where large congregations are few and far between, is that the songs need to fly with a handful of voices, often singing in unison. That's asking a lot from a song, and a lot from those who write them — especially since we're not composer laureates. Songs come from moments of inspiration — we don't know why it happens when it does, but it does. But rarely will a song be ready to sing without considerable work on refining and perfecting it. Saints who come up with songs are rising to these challenges.

Good lyrics are a challenge in themselves. Lyrics are the most important element of our songs, as they are addressed to God and our fellow-disciples, 'with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gratitude in your hearts to the Lord' (Colossians 3:16). To come up with words that teach and admonish is quite an art, and one needs to start with a good knowledge of God's word. Plenty of songs by Fanny J Crosby still strongly resonate with God's people today because they are jam-packed with themes and imagery from Scripture. (And the tunes are pleasant to sing.)

By contrast, the so-called 'seven-eleven' type songs (seven words sung eleven times) so common in our era draw criticism that they are very much lacking in substance. They often say pretty much the same thing as the last song. And the next. One of my fond memories is watching my toddler run his finger along the lines of a hymnbook, singing to himself, 'God, Holy Spirit, church, Jesus, love...' Adorable! - even if the tune wasn't great. But really, adults should be able to write lyrics of a better standard than that.

Then there's the challenge of finding a way to share songs between congregations. Brethren have shown there are

ways. The Canberra brethren put some of the songs they had composed on their website, so anyone could download them and learn them. The church which formerly met in City Beach in Perth put songs they came up with into a book, and published some in their former periodical, *The Truth in Love*.

Songs are not only a reflection of the culture from which they come, but an influence on those who sing them. They teach and reinforce beliefs. They are a movement's rallying cry, voicing its hopes and reinforcing the basis of that hope. So where does that leave us if we don't sing our own songs? If we sing someone else's songs, we tend to adopt their views and ways of thinking.

Isaac Watts sometimes used tunes he knew from popular theatre, or just off the street. They didn't have to negotiate the copyright minefield that we do today. Those who use music as a cash cow don't make it easy for us. This is yet another reason to make up our own songs, and disciples who have done so in recent years in Australia have freely given those songs to God and his people to use for his glory.

So let's consider how we may stimulate one another to love and good songs—songs which reflect our own faith in, and adoration of, our Lord; songs which scripturally teach, admonish and encourage our fellow-servants in Christ; songs which suit our often small gatherings. Songs of and for the Lord's church in Australia. ■

*Brett Christensen and his wife, Lesley, and their children are part of the South East congregation in Melbourne, Victoria.
qohelath@optusnet.com.au*

News



Camp Challenge

Camp Challenge is a family camp held in NSW each year between Christmas and New Year. This year was a new 'challenge' for the camp board members in that it was decided to move the camp to a new location in western Sydney. The site is Lutanda's Yarramundi River Park Recreation and Conference Centre.

The move to the new site promoted the camp theme for the year of 'New Beginnings'. This theme covered classes and activities from adults through to small children. Over 130 people attended camp over the five days. Those fortunate enough to attend were uplifted and encouraged by many teachers from within the church in Australia.

One of the features of the camp was the teaching and activity marquee. This gave camp an 'under the big top' excitement which carried throughout the week. It is planned to utilise the marquee again next year until the new meeting facilities are completed.

A highlight of Challenge 2009 was the baptism of Kezia Mason. As always, it was a wonderful opportunity to welcome a new sister in Christ into our midst during camp.

Bob Marks, Warringah Church of Christ, NSW. catchus@bigpond.net.au

Camp Gidawarra

Camp Gidawarra 2010 (3-8 January) at Camp Bornhoffen in Queensland was the biggest ever with 192 registered campers representing around 15 congregations, as well as others who came up just for a day during the week.

Tim Woodroof, from Nashville, Tennessee, was guest speaker for the adult classes each morning on the theme, 'The Heart of the Gospel'. Tim went through an overview of the gospel story from creation to culmination and explored where the power of the gospel lays, in what God has done for us.

The teenagers didn't miss out either, with Drew Potts and Sarah Potts from the Townsville church teaming up to teach them.

One highlight of the week was Sam McInturff from the Holland Park church deciding to follow Jesus and being

baptised down in the creek. Another, the kids might argue, were the occasional rain showers that made the hills nice and slippery to slide down on their body boards.

*Jonathan Leijen, Holland Park Church of Christ, Queensland
jleijen@yahoo.com*

Camp Warana

The 2010 Warana Christian encampment held at Myrtle Park about 30 minutes drive east of Launceston, Tasmania, was directed by Garrett Leitch. It featured great bible class lessons around the theme of 'Fishing with the Master'. The morning sermons were on evidences for the truth of the Bible. The devotions were taken from the kings of Israel and what we can learn from their lives. These great lessons combined with Christian fellowship and the absolutely beautiful weather

Continued page 7

the work especially in poorer countries in our part of the world, (which turns out to be most other countries in our part of the world!). We may be few, but we now live in what is probably the most economically blessed country in the world.

It is worth considering initiatives that might help overcome any reluctance to support overseas missions because of the real problems that have been

experienced. One idea is for someone to create or use an existing website to collate and make available information about what needs exist and what churches and individuals here are doing. This may help avoid duplication of effort, over-payment to some local workers and help churches with the funds available to make better-informed decisions.

What do you think? ■

Prepared by the editor who is grateful for input from many sources from which we were only able to select a few examples of the support provided by Australian churches.

News continued.



(no sign of rain!) made the camp very enjoyable.

Alex & Jodie McPherson entertained us with some fun camp fire activities. Ritchie Dona organized a very novel sports day. And as always, skit night

was a highlight - everybody enjoyed Greg McPherson's MC (David Letterman) performance and his much loved 4-minute warning bell!

It is planned that next year's camp will be directed by Leigh Stokes.

*Leigh Stokes, Eastern Shore Church of Christ, Tasmania.
Stokesies@aapt.net.au*

Sudanese Christians Meeting in Melbourne

Several families of Sudanese refugees of the long-running war in that country are now meeting in homes in Chadstone, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria. Some lost family members through the war or have endured separation from their families.

Most came to Christ in Ethiopian refugee camps through World Bible School or one of three Sudanese churches established by graduates from Sunset International Bible Institute in Ethiopia.

These brethren have been arriving in Australia over a period of several years, but have now made contact with the Belmore Road Church of Christ so that they can enjoy a wider fellowship.

*Trevor Baker, Belmore Road Church of Christ, Victoria
trevbaker@optusnet.com.au*

Third year of grants for the Australian Church of Christ Evangelistic Trust

2010 saw the third consecutive year for grants provided by the Australian Church of Christ Evangelistic Trust (ACCET). Over the three years a total of \$50,000 has been set aside by ACCET to help workers in Australia. This year \$20,000 was allocated for grants.

The 2010 grants went to assist Hunter Valley Christians for David Carr and Sam White; the Heidelberg West Church of Christ for Graham Wall; and STAMP Ministries for Dean Edginton. In addition the Macquarie Church of Christ continues to receive help for Peter Tickner from ACCET. In the past the Blacktown Church of Christ has also received help for Les Totman.

David Payne, the Secretary for ACCET said of the 2010 grants: 'This year's grant applications gave us Trustees some high's and low's. A high was the ability to help some of the recent MSOBS graduates Graham Wall and Sam White, who are just commencing paid ministry roles in Australia. On the other hand, for the first time this year the grant applications exceeded the amount we were able to give out and it disappoints us when we can't help everyone.'

ACCET exists to help financially support evangelism among churches of Christ in Australia. The funding for ACCET comes from the generous donations of Christians who want to help with the support of evangelists, students, training and evangelistic programs. ACCET's capital is wisely invested and the interest earned each year is used to fund the grants - the larger the capital, the greater the grants. If you would like to donate to ACCET please send your deposit to ACCET, PO Box 552, Gosford, NSW 2250 or directly deposit at Westpac BSB 032 669 Account No. 18 6499.

David Payne, Gosford Church of Christ, NSW. paynedt@bigpond.com

Seven Years Online

Churches of Christ in Australia contribute some excellent websites to the internet. One of these is www.simplybible.com emanating from Childers in Queensland. This website receives more than 2,500 page visits every 24 hours. That's a million page requests in a year. The site offers more than 1,000 studies, including training tutorials and Bible lessons. The webservant, Ron Graham, wrote all the studies. He also wrote the complex programs that control page design, navigation system, and the site's own search engine. With the Lord's blessing, including modest but ongoing support from some Australian Christians, www.simplybible.com has passed its seventh year online. In 2009 Ron completed a major upgrade to keep the site up with today's internet standards. ■

Ron Graham works with both the Bundaberg and Childers churches in Queensland. ron@simplybible.com

Interview



with Ian Coker

You served the church in Toowoomba as a full-time worker for 35 years before moving to Townsville last year. Can you give us an overview of your time there?

When I was completing 2 years of study at MSOBS, Hartley Simmons, an American preacher in Toowoomba, asked Diane and I if we would like to join him in Toowoomba on the basis that he could arrange full-time support. That was 1974 when the church numbered just 12 mostly new Christians who met in a rented shop in the main street. When we left last year the church numbered around 90 (it had been larger but some left in recent years to plant or support new churches in the north of Toowoomba and in Christchurch, New Zealand). As the church grew they were able to fully take over my support as well as build our own meeting place in 1977-78 and extend it in 1993, in the main by the labour of the brethren. When we left the church was served by elders and deacons.

What was the biggest challenge for you during your time in Toowoomba?

Challenges abound always, but I would like to respond from two perspectives, congregational and personal. For any congregation to endure the same preacher for so long is a big ask and it is also a challenge for the preacher to remain fresh. This is why I left Toowoomba – I needed a break and the congregation deserved one! I believe a new set of challenges from time to time is invigorating.

Congregationally, I suppose one of the biggest challenges was the perennial challenge to stay on the straight and narrow in a period of immense change. In an age of fads and fancies that continually wash over the brotherhood, and which has been only increased by the flood of information through Christian bookstores and the internet, to weed out that which is faddish and digressive from that which is good is a constant task. Other pressures have come because of changes in society that have challenged the command not to be conformed to the world. Such changes, coupled with the gospel-resistant culture in which we live makes it harder to find receptive soil and has seen changes in the brotherhood in teaching and practice.

What have you learnt about church leadership?

We preach the headship of Christ so we need to accept it. I have learnt you cannot control people! If people won't obey the Word of God voluntarily, then in the end there is not much you can do. But the old maxims about the power of example are also true. You cannot lead people by driving them from behind. You cannot ask people to do what you will not do yourself.

What have you experienced since you moved to Townsville?

For one thing it has meant moving further away from children and grandchildren. For another we have had to 'make tents'. Back when I studied at MSOBS our expectation was that on completion we would return to Queensland where I would get a secular job and we would help the church wherever we were. It just took 35 years to realize that expectation! It actually took three long months to finally land a job at Bunnings and even longer to sell our house in Toowoomba and buy one here, but we are now settling in.

So the challenge will be to stay with the Book and maintain a non-denominational stance rather than drift into an inter-denominational position.

Townsville is growing and is now 170,000 in population, so the church feels both insignificant and yet possesses potential. Having no full-time worker presents its difficulties, but we are trying to gain a program slot on a radio station to spread the gospel and gain contacts.

What special challenges face a regional church compared to a capital city church?

Actually I see some advantages for a regional church. It costs less to purchase land on which to build. The physical distance between members and assembly points are that much closer in the country cities and towns, making it easier for more fellowship. Furthermore, regional churches have the opportunity to be better known in smaller communities. On the other hand, it can mean that any problem in the church can be more damaging to evangelism, and the smaller population can mean trolling the same patch of sea more often.

What future challenges do you think will be experienced by churches in Australia?

It depends on whether I am in a more optimistic or apprehensive mode at the time of answer! Right now I am somewhat apprehensive. The general drift of Western culture would seem to indicate that we will find ourselves more and more marginalised. To defend the authority and inspiration of the Bible and faithfully communicate the gospel of Christ to our society will remain our biggest challenge.

Because changes in society have the same effect upon all churches, we are seeing a 'circling the wagons' mentality that says that all Christian-minded people should rally together to face the onslaught of materialism and secularism. So the challenge will be to stay with the Book and maintain a non-denominational stance rather than drift into an inter-denominational position.

Already we are seeing a trend toward mainstream evangelicalism with a desire to be 'like the nations round about', with doubts about our past distinctives, even including such fundamental things as baptism unto remission of sins. It seems to me like a number of brethren are heading down a similar road the Associated (Conference) Churches of Christ have gone, with some even calling for integration with it. I also detect the influence of Calvinism, which has become the orthodox position of the evangelical movement. Pentecostal influences are also being seen in the church with a drift toward experiential means of determining truth and practice, rather than an objective understanding founded on a conviction of the all-sufficiency of the Word.

It may be a case of 'the older we get the better we were', but I don't believe that we understand the Biblical doctrine of the church and its identity as we did a generation ago. Whilst a generation ago we perhaps focused too exclusively on the fundamentals to the detriment of such things as personal growth, now the tables are turning and we are neglecting the fundamentals. Like the soldier in Micaiah's parable, 'whilst I was busy here and there, my charge was gone' (1 Kings 20:40).

So, in my more pessimistic moments, I think it is entirely possible that the next generation may require us to start again and do what our fathers did – 'come out from among them and be separate'. But I suppose that has always been the challenge hasn't it – to be a Christian in a pagan world and to be non-denominational in a denominationalised world. ■



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